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ABSTRACT

This publication serves as a companion volume to the 1994 KIDS COUNT Data Book. The two books represent different ways of portraying the status and prospects of children in the United States today. While the Data Book profiles quantitative measures of children's lives, this volume features interviews of kids from across the country who describe their worlds in vivid terms. The book was assembled to capture some of the individual stories behind the numbers in the Data Book and to convey some special human insights arising from candid conversations among kids themselves. The roughly 40 interviews here, conducted by children and adolescents, are grouped into three sections: (1) Hard Times/High Hopes; (2) Dropping Out/Hanging On; and (3) Mother-Daughter/Father-Son. It is hoped that the most troubled and troubling of the voices recorded here will deepen public understanding of the desperate conditions confronting too many of America's disadvantaged children. (RJM)

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Kids' Voices Count

Illuminating the Sta[illegible]cs

ED 375 353

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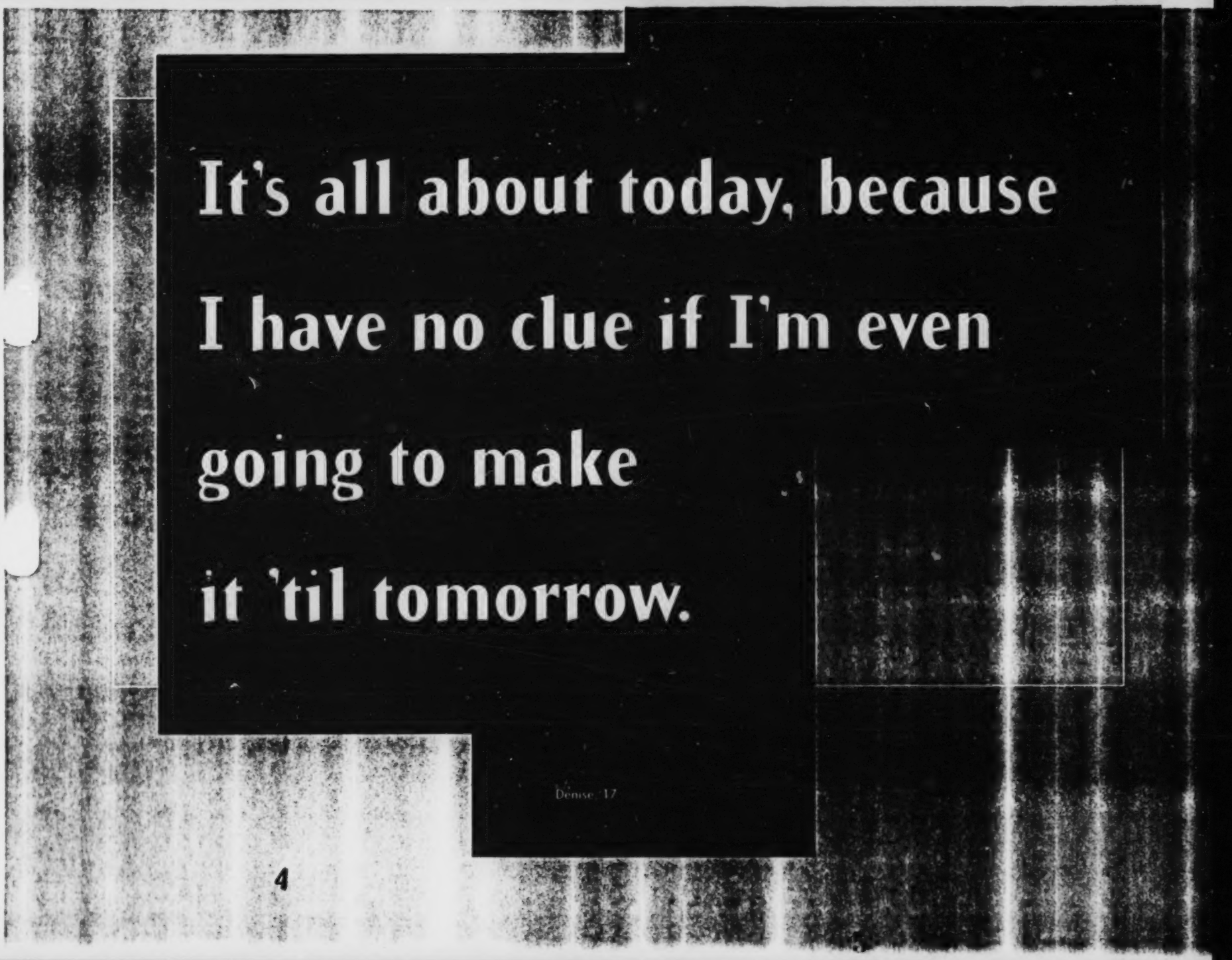
It's all about today, because
I have no clue if I'm even
going to make
it 'til tomorrow.
Denise, 17

Kids' Voices Count

Illuminating the Statistics

Edited by Jessica Beels

CHILDREN'S EXPRESS

Statistics drawn from the 1994 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*

Funded by The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Acknowledgments

Children's Express has many to thank for helping gather the voices of children and teens across the nation. Quite simply, *KIDS' VOICES COUNT* would not have been possible without the generosity of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the visionary leadership of Doug Nelson and Bill Rust and the guidance of Bill O'Hare.

Thanks to Jessica Beels, CE's Editor-in-Chief and KIDS COUNT Project Director for her unswerving dedication to finding the most compelling and representative voices, and to all the CE editors and reporters for their compassion and concern for their peers throughout the summer of 1993. We are indebted to Eric Stansbury, National KIDS COUNT Project Coordinator, and CE Bureau Directors, Cliff Hahn (NY), Charlie Lord (DC), Lynn Sygiel (IN), Mary Ganz (CA), and Ann Allen (MD) and other CE staff who guided and supported the CE KIDS COUNT Teams; to Nick Terranova, for his help in Florida; to all the KIDS COUNT Project Directors, social service agency staff and CE friends who helped bring the pieces together; and to Wendy Potasnik and Allison Crockett, our national interns who made it all look easy. Our gratitude goes also to Judy Weitz of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, to NPR's Larry Abramson, to Matthew Taylor of Taylorvisions for providing technical training, and to Delta Airlines for keeping us all on schedule. Most of all, we applaud the courage and honesty of the young people who opened their lives and hearts and shared their stories.

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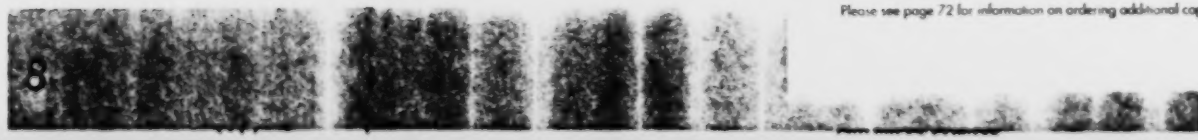

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Since 1975, Children's Express has been giving children and teens important responsibilities and a significant voice in the world. The CE News Service, carried in adult features sections of subscribing newspapers, is reported by children 13 and under who are trained and led by teen editors. CE special projects have included three books, a 13-part prime-time PBS television news magazine (Peabody and Emmy Awards), public radio, national symposia and hearings, and now *Kids' Voices Count*.

Kids' Voices Count presents some of the voices behind the statistics in the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. They were gathered by the teen editors of Children's Express, who traveled to cities, towns, and Indian reservations throughout America, under a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The CE editors met with children and teens in schools, on the streets, in parks and playgrounds, in institutions, and in programs.

The lives that are recounted here are filled with rejection and violence, courage, and hope. They tell us, often with stunning insight, of endangered futures—perhaps including our future as a society. Listen to 17 year old Linda:

> Now I don't think that just money is the answer. We need to be innovative and we need to be creative to try and get kids off the streets and back in school where they need to be.
>
> I don't think any one adult knows what's going on in our mind. We need to get adults that are responsible—that are accountable to us. I would get a lot of youth participation in how that money's going to get divvied up between agencies. And make sure it goes to agencies that are actually taking the time to listen to the youth.
>
> And I would get more recreation out there, more teachers and people to give conflict resolution and self esteem classes, centers that are open for kids to go in after dark because there's nothing else around. I think the kids need to have a place to feel safe. And they need to feel wanted for anything to ever change.

These children are telling us not only about their hard lives, but about what they need—what can be done to support their hopes and aspirations. It is time for us to listen and act—to make kids' voices count.

Robert H. Clampitt
President
Children's Express Foundation, Inc.

Kids' Voices Count is a companion volume to the 1994 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. These two publications represent different ways of portraying the status and prospects of children in the United States today. The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses the best available quantitative measures of children's health, education, and social and economic well-being. The aim is to produce an aggregate picture of child well-being that provides citizens and policy makers with benchmarks for measuring improvements and setbacks in the overall quality of childhood life in America.

Kids' Voices Count was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in hopes that the teen editors of Children's Express could capture some of the individual stories behind the numbers in the Data Book and convey some special human insights arising from candid conversations among kids themselves. As you will read, the editors at Children's Express have recorded some extraordinary voices and stories.

As with many of the statistics in the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, a number of the stories in this volume make grim reading and document some of the consequences of not attending to the critical needs of children. It is our hope that the most troubled and troubling of the voices recorded here will deepen public understanding of the desperate conditions confronting too many of America's disadvantaged children.

Douglas W. Nelson
Executive Director
Annie E. Casey Foundation

To me, being a kid is either putting up with stuff or doing something about it, especially in America. So many things affect a kid that one must be responsible enough to do something about it.

To me, childhood is a survival test. That's what being a kid is all about. If you can survive childhood you can survive anything, especially with so much stuff that kids have to put up with today.

Scarlett Arias, 14
Children's Express, New York

This project has taught me that statistics may not lie, but they don't tell the whole truth. Before, I would look at a statistic about a runaway youth, for example, and say to myself, "Well, that person ran away." I didn't consider the factors that caused that person to run away.

I have learned that there are programs in this country that are helping to keep us from being a part of the statistics. But when you turn on the news you most likely will hear about the 10-year-old boy who was shot at the corner, not about the 10-year-old boy turning his life around with the help of a program.

I hope that people will open their eyes to the problems that are plaguing our society. Also I hope that government officials will see that we don't need to decrease money for kids' programs, we need to increase it.

Mark Jennings, 16
Children's Express, Washington, DC

These statistics aren't just statistics, but they have real people and real experiences to prove them. Doing this project helped me understand that world beyond my own.

Ben Young, 12
Children's Express, Indianapolis

I thought I knew what kids living on the streets had to go through. But what came out in the interviews was harder and tougher than I ever imagined. Most of the people I talked to were a lot more optimistic than I thought they'd be. They actually had plans for the future.

I could have talked to the kids for hours, about everything. But they're there today and somewhere else tomorrow, and I'll never see them again.

I'm in college now, working toward a career in child advocacy law and policy. Since I have talked to these kids, and I know what their lives are like, I owe it to them not to forget.

Lisa Sohn, 18
Children's Express, Oakland

The number of high school dropouts in our country is staggering. Looking at a list of numbers does nothing to help the problem. Talking to kids about it and letting their voices be heard can be very influential.

By working on this project we can shed some light on this and other important topics facing the youth of America.

Eric Augenstein, 15
Children's Express, Indianapolis

The thing that I found that really surprised me was the amount of hope that was in a lot of these kids. The people who were affected by abuse in the home, especially, still had incredibly high hopes for having stable families when they were older and having stable careers.

Fedley, 17
Children's Express, New York

I think that being a kid is the most important stage of your life. It's a time when you start to develop a personality. It's when you start to learn about who you are, and what you want to do with yourself. And it's a time when you develop trust. It's a time when you learn how to be a person in society.

Unfortunately a lot of kids don't have that. If you don't grow up learning how to be a productive person, then you're going to have a problem once you grow up.

Sarah Rosen, 16
Children's Express, New York

Obviously there's never going to be any solution if you say that there can't be one.

Suki Cheong, 16
Children's Express, New York

Hard Times High Hopes

I've got family most everywhere I go. I've got family up and down the streets, so I really don't need protection or anything. There's always a house that I can go to if somebody is bothering me.

Terence, 11 *Seattle, WA*

Every morning when I get up, I be thinking, "Who's going to say something to me today?" or, "What's going to happen?" because, I mean, some people, they just shoot you for noth ing. Can't trust really nobody. Sometimes I happen to be thinking, "Could I trust my own self?"

Darryl, 15 *Los Angeles, CA*

I hope them the best. Take care.

Eric Zamora, 18 *Children's Express, New York*

Manuel

Manuel, 15

Manuel is Dominican. Not big, but you can tell he's strong, like wiry, and self-confident. He is the only one I talked to who just took things in his own hands, coming up with all these ways to make money that don't have anything to do with drugs. ■ I think he is just very honest about himself. He's not in your face and looking for trouble, but he knows that he did really violent things and he can be very aggressive. Yet he is willing to admit that it affected him in some way, that he would get up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. But he's not a soft-hearted person—he's really a survivor. ■ Suki Cheong

I used to work in the morgue. At first I didn't want to get a job. I said, "Nah, it's gonna be boring." Then when I started working and I stopped, I wanted to work more.

Not a lot of things happen in the morgue. They showed me how to do autopsies. They gave me books about it. They even told me if I wanted to go to medical school they could pull some strings for me. I learned how they examine specimens, how they examine body parts, and how they get their results.

Basically it wasn't that hard, it was just, like, routine. Some of the other volunteers that were there, they couldn't stand it. They used to leave every time there was an autopsy. I stayed. I helped. I cut. I used to put the organs in place. When a body used to come in I used to put it in the fridge. For me, everything was routine. I didn't even think about doing it. I just did it.

Actually I feel more comfortable there. Nobody gives no complaints. It's all quiet and nothing happening. It's just you and them, and they're not moving. They're not going to do anything to you. It's hard to make conversations, though.

Some kids have the privilege. Some kids have it good. They don't have to work for their stuff. All I have in my pockets right now is little spiders trying to do webs on them. I have nothing more than that. Some people can say, "Dad, I want a computer," and they just get it. Me, I'm paying for it. Every month I got to pay a certain amount of money. And when you get it yourself, you appreciate it more, because you worked for it.

Some people say that I'm pretty resourceful, 'cause out of anything I'll make money. I think ideas, and I can do them.

I want to be a mechanic. I can fix a lot. My aunt's car was broken. The guy was charging her $500 to fix the motor. I charged her $50, just get the parts and I'll do it. Two days she was running with her car up and down the street—she was so happy.

This kid, his computer, a virus got in it. He didn't know what to do. He had no idea. He bought the virus program, he didn't know how to use it. He called me. I told him, "Well, you know what's the charge, right?" He said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, $20, $20." "No," I say, "now it's more, 'cause now I gotta do more." I made a story. I made a long story. Make money. In a way, I con them. I don't con them, because I do the job.

When you want a certain amount of money it's the little petty things—quarters and dimes that we go buy little candy here and a little candy there, you could buy yourself clothes for a month or for a few years just collecting them for a few months. Nobody thinks about that.

They want to get money now. That's how I've seen a lot of kids, even some of my friends, in the morgue. I've seen them, just laying there. And even though they're dead, I'm always going to say, "You're as dumb as you look." They have to be.

I had three friends that I seen die because of that. One of them was just an argument. Two of them just because they were there. They got shot just because they were there. And I'll be standing there looking at them die.

One of my friends yesterday got shot for an argument. Her mother was in an argument with this man and she went to separate it. The man took out a .22, shot her, her mom and her aunt. Then he looked at me. I didn't say anything, I just stood there. He looked at me and went inside. I started running for the ambulance. They didn't believe me. So I punched the ambulance. It hurt, but I punched the door. I dented it in. Then they followed me.

I went to the hospital today, and, I mean, I've had the guts to do a lot of things, but not going there and seeing her. She's fine. But I didn't have the guts to go see her, because I didn't do anything, because the guy ran, I could've just tripped him over. I didn't do anything. Nothing. I just stood there.

I was, like, a defender in school. I was known just for that. Every day there used to be a fight, I was right in the middle of it. I used to go home with a busted lip, big goofy looking nose,

I mean, I was hurt. But every day I was telling my mother, "Oh no, I was playing football." She wouldn't believe me. I have a thick record. That's because I was helping people.

Where I live nobody listens. You talk to them, nobody listens. The only thing they listen to is when you punch them real hard and they down on the floor. You tell them shut up, they'll shut up. Because they know you can hit them, they know you can hurt him. That's the only way they'll respect you.

Pain doesn't even bother me anymore. Seeing death, nothing bothers me. I could see blood, operations, anything. Nothing bothers me, but it gets to you after a while.

Sometimes I wake up in cold sweats pissed off and I'll just go walking. Sometimes they don't find me for days. I just pack up and leave. Once I stood out for five days, five days complete. I went everywhere.

I'm a living example what happens to you when there's too much violence. 'Cause I can do anything and not regret it. I used to slap a kid because he was there. It didn't matter to me. I used to hang out with a pack of people, they used to pack rifles, shotguns, guns. I even had one of my own. I even took it to school for about a year. Never caught me with it.

I sold it, 'cause why spend the rest of my life in jail for some stupid kid who robbed my bag? Might as well kick his butt up and down the street, and take my bag back, instead of shooting him and finding him dead—then I get charged, I get life.

I was 14 when I was doing all that stuff. What made me change my mind was the stupidity about it. At first I thought, "Well, yeah, man, he did something to you, go get him." Now I look at myself and I just sit back.

I want to feel good about myself. The problem with me is for me to feel good I gotta do something to somebody, make it even. Make them feel what the other person felt. What they felt. I know what people feel when they get a bone broken. When they get disappointed, when friends die, that doesn't even bother me. I don't even cry.

My grandmother died and I didn't even cry. 'Cause it didn't bother me no more. You get used to all these deaths around you. Nothing really matters. There's a few things that you have fun with. You make a few jokes. But that's in the exterior and inside you know that you're as cold as ice.

Now I avoid trouble. A lot of people that I know on my block got prior records. One of them was going to go to jail for life. He killed two people. He just took out the gun and pow! Pow! Just because he was there. He was drunk. He got mad. Pow! Pow! The cop came and arrested him. He was laughing. He was making jokes about it. I left. I can't see that.

That's what these guys do. They don't feel satisfied when they do something. That's why they want to do it over and they want to do it right. You only get one chance at one thing. And when you mess that up you know you're gonna get it. Either you get it when you're older or you get it on the day of judgment. One way or another you still get it. They're still gonna get you. No matter what you do. They'll still get you.

A lot of people believe in the law of apocalypse. That's survival of the fittest. That's what's going on now. If you're not packing, you're not strapped, you're not fit. If they can get you and shoot you and you're gone, that's it, you're not fit no more.

I was with my father for a time. I know how he is. When he says something, either you do it or you get punished. You have no choice. You have two choices. You do it right or you get punished.

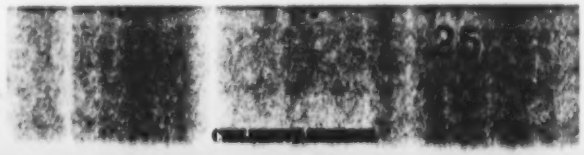
I used to go to school and make 90s. He sees my report card now—70s, 80s, a few 90s—he would hit me. 'Cause he wants everything the way he wants. The way he was. He wants everything 90s.

My father, I haven't missed him that much. My father's 73 years old. He married five times. I'm the only boy. He tried 17 times. I got 17 sisters.

My father's in Santo Domingo. He went back. He didn't like it here. He left me here because it's a better location here. But he knows that one way or another I'm coming out. He has got this feeling.

I really feel that we're so close. I'm the only boy. Everything he has is mine. Everything, his underwear, when he dies, is mine. My sisters talk to him and they say, "Why is he getting everything?" 'Cause I'm the only one who's carrying on the name.

We come from a long line. I'm the last one. If I go, if I die before I get a kid or anything, that's it. There's no more. That's why my father says I have to survive.



When I came to this country, my aunt said I wasn't gonna amount to anything. I wasn't gonna pass her daughter. Her daughter's in the seventh grade. I'm going to semi-college in medicine and in computers. I'm beyond her. I'm way past her.

My grandmother on my mother's side told my mother before she died, I'm the only one that's gonna get out the slum, 'cause every one of their children, all they gonna do is mess up. And look as like I've proven that to her.

I wouldn't like to move out of my neighborhood. Not because I'm gonna miss all the bad things—I'm gonna be right in the middle of them. I think it's the thrill. You get so used to something, you know. When you get used to a ring you don't want to take it off anymore. You get used to this chain, you don't even know it's there.

Have you ever seen a guy who skiis on the train? Or footprints on the ceiling? Or a guy in a dress with a mustache and everything? Have you ever seen that? Only in New York. That's what's so strange, you can't leave.

But if I leave a chunk of the Bronx is gonna leave with me. You can't leave New York. It always stays with you. You go to Florida, they know right away that you a New Yorker, "He's a New Yorker. Get away from him. You know what those guys can do to you." Anywhere you go, New Yorkers are supposed to be the worst.

A lot of people are gonna die before it gets better. But it's going to get better. That's what I'm sure of. That's why I'm staying. This is what I am. This is where I live. This is who I am. I can't get out of here.

There's three things you gotta learn. You don't drop out. You try not to commit any crimes. And you survive. You survive your block. You survive school, that's for sure. If I survive all this crap, I'm definitely going to survive school. 'Cause it's nothing. I know I'm gonna make it. 'Cause I'm trying harder than some of these kids out there. You hang on, you do what you have to do, and you could have fun and make sure what you did is right. You have nothing to worry about. ■ **Interviewed by Suki Cheong, 16 and Lydia Isaac, 16**

Terence

Terence, 11

Terence is very articulate for an 11-year-old. He is a rolly-polly looking guy, really sort of bright and energetic. He was kind of dressed up, not suit-wise, but street-wise, really colorful baggy clothing and stuff. He seemed to be cooler than his peers. The kids his age seemed to defer to him. ■ The community center looked like a really cool place to hang out. You could tell immediately because there were so many kids on the stoop. And there was security. You don't need to worry about gangs and stuff because the cops, they're right there. ■ Suki Cheong and Libusha Kelly

I'll be going to middle school next year. I'll be in the sixth grade.

I'm good at solving problems and stuff. Like, if somebody didn't do nothing and they are being charged with something, I'm good at getting at the truth with people. And I'm a good football player.

I come to the community center to play basketball, lift weights, have other activities and stuff.

It's fun, 'cause my friends are here and it's much better than sitting at home and watching TV all day. It's like a place where I can come when I'm bored, 'cause there's always people that can help me whenever I have problems or anything.

Also, I've got somebody here that I can depend on. I have my friend Greg in the other room. He gives me advice, we play basketball together, and he takes me out and stuff.

The neighborhood is kind of like a bad influence on me, but I just stick to my schoolwork, have my fun and leave. Like gang members and stuff—out of the question.

I'm kind of scared wearing the coat I got on now because "West" is a symbol of a gang and people might shoot me or something because of the coat I got on.

A cousin of mine got killed. He was down by the park and he got shot in the head, I think. A gang shooting. I don't think he was involved in a gang, but it's the car he drove influenced the gang. He had a red Mercedes Benz, and I guess they wanted his car or something.

I don't stay on the street. I'm maybe at home, around the house, or down here, so I try to stay away from gangs. I used to live somewhere else, and there was gangs there, too. And one day when I was going down, some people that were in a gang started talking to me and asking if I wanted to be in a gang and stuff, and I told them no. And every night, they used to bother me. They're trying to tell me if I be in gangs it's cool, but I tell them I'd rather do my schoolwork and make a living. When I moved out here, I just stayed away from all that stuff.

I mean, if I was in a gang, I would end up killed before I was eighteen. I'd get shot. And I want to live a little longer than that, get a job, have a family or something. I just ain't going to gangs.

I've got family most everywhere I go. I've got family up and down the streets, so I really don't need protection or anything. There's always a house that I can go to if somebody is bothering me. ■ **Interviewed by Suki Cheong, 16 and Libusha Kelly, 17**

It was like I knew him. I was just, like, real mad 'cause he ain't there no more. And every time I think about it, it's like I seen him yesterday. I was just watching TV with him or whatever, you know, just be thinking he gone, he ain't there no more. You know, he can't do the things we used to do. He just, like, don't exist no more. He's just gone. It hurts really. That's how it makes me feel.

If someone did the same thing to me, I'd have to think fast. It just depends on who the person is and then it depends on if you have a weapon or not, because if he don't have no gun or no knife or whatever, I'm not going to give him my jacket. If he have a gun, yeah. I never carry a weapon, not really—unless you're talking about a screwdriver or something.

Every morning when I get up, I be thinking, "Who's going to say something to me today?" or "What's going to happen?" because, I mean, some people, they just shoot you for nothing. So I got to watch out for myself, you know. Can't trust really nobody. Sometimes I happen to be thinking, "Could I trust my own self?" ■ **Interviewed by Galen Moore, 15**

Darryl, 15 *Los Angeles, CA*

When I picture life in areas of L.A., like South Central, violence seems to be an everyday occurrence. But a lot of the kids I talked to there were fairly sheltered. What separates kids into the victims and the observers? It seems no one ever approached Darryl and tried to pick a fight with him. I wonder what kids like Darryl are doing right not to get shot, beat up, or stolen from? And what are kids like his friend who got shot doing wrong? Maybe they aren't doing anything wrong. Maybe they're just unlucky. ■ **Galen Moore**

I can't tell what's rougher, Los Angeles or New York. Yeah, it's a dangerous place. You got to watch your back wherever you go. You can't just go somewhere and know you ain't going to be shot at. You know, it's not like that.

It's not the place, it's the people. L.A. is not dangerous. It's the people that's in it that's making it dangerous. Like, a friend of mine, three years ago, he got killed over a jacket when the starter jackets were out and stuff, you know. When he was wearing that jacket, they wanted his jacket and he didn't want to give it away. He didn't want to give away his jacket so they shot him.

Henry, 18 *Tampa, FL*

We went to Ybor City and it looked old-fashioned. It was an old cigar factory where we went. They fixed it up and it looked all right. ■ **Henry's a good heavy-weighted kid. Polite, respectful. He never met his father because he left when Henry was real young. He says he'll never do that to his kids and I gotta respect him for that.** ■ **He got attacked by a group of five guys with baseball bats. His girlfriend tried to get help, but people closed their doors, didn't want nothing to do with that. They shouldn't be doing that. You see somebody in the street getting beat up, try to call for some help—I couldn't just walk away like that. If I was there, you know, I would try to help him or something. I hope him the best, you know. Take care.** ■ **Rolando Liriano and Eric Zamora**

I'm originally from Syracuse, New York. I lived in Tampa most of my life, though. I just graduated high school. I'm getting ready to go to college.

I grew up kind of without a father, almost, 'cause my dad used to work out of town for, like, a week and then come back for a weekend. And then my parents got divorced, and I didn't talk to him for, like, four years. But I got a stepfather now, and got a loving mother, and a brother who's 14.

Well, I mean, occasionally things get hard. You have the natural anxiety about it, I guess, but my general philosophy in life is it'll be all right. Things will work themselves out. 'Cause if I don't have any money, it'll be all right. I'll just stay home.

My dad didn't call me. He'd never call. He'd never send any kind of card. You know, nothing, no contact whatsoever with my father and, you know, for years that got to me. That got to me bad. I was real violent about it, actually. I fought constantly before I got into high school. I mean, to the point where I was getting suspended. I would fight constantly, and I'd get suspended constantly.

Then I kind of came to terms with it, and I started playing a lot of football, high school football. You know, you have people to talk to. You got buddies to talk to.

But there's been times when I find when I play football, I take out a lot of aggression on the field. So I don't really come home and think about things. You're too tired to, you just go to sleep. But sometimes, when you're off season and you don't have as many things to do, it starts to get to you a little worse. But now, I know that I tried, and I reached out, and I've put the ball in his court, and what he does with it is his choice.

I want to turn into law enforcement, because, you know, I've seen what can happen.

My girlfriend was raped by someone she knew. She had a little bit to drink. And the guy took advantage of that and pinned her down. He's going to jail because she did all the rape counsel thing, and she went directly there, and all that.

I was on the phone with her, and she was crying. Normally, she won't tell me why she's crying. She just said she needed somebody to talk to. But I kind of forced it out of her, kept forcing it out of her and she kept on saying, "Henry, I didn't do anything. Henry, I didn't do anything." She was worried about what I was going to say.

And so she told me, and first thing I said was, "Police, now." And then I turned around to my buddies and I said, "Let's get him now." But I guess I couldn't do both—go to the police and get him. So we did the right thing, you know.

I bought a gun. I was ready. I was. But I started talking to the police, and found out that he would go to jail. So I figured that was worse. He'll meet up with a big guy named Bruno in jail, you know, and he'll pay for what he did.

But the way I figure it is, I can ruin him. He goes to jail, he's ruined. I mean he's 18 years old, and he's got a record already, he's got priors, you know. If he goes to jail on a rape charge, you know, it's gonna ruin him for life. It's gonna wreck his entire life. And that's the way I look at. That may sound harsh, or whatever, but what he did was harsh, too. So, you know, I guess that's my way of getting back. But it was just better this way, I guess.

Now, you know, she's all right. It affected us for a while. It was hard to go on like we used to.

It still affects me, 'cause, I mean, I always thought I was going to be a suit and tie type person. I was either gonna be a psychologist or I was gonna be a lawyer, or something to that effect. And it makes me want to have a badge and a gun. I mean, it sounds stereotypical. It just makes me want to be there, trying to make a difference for somebody, for somebody that's in the same predicament. Maybe I can help a little more than the police did with her. Maybe I can help. Maybe I can understand better.

But it's kind of pushed me into that. It's like a drive now. It's like something that I want to do now, because I don't want to see it happen. It happens too much. Eventually it's gotta stop. So I guess everybody's got to put in their own little contribution.

Maybe I'll go visit him and that'll make me feel good. Maybe to look at him on the other side of the glass, that'll finally be a time when I'll feel mentally better about the situation. I'll feel he got his, you know. ■ **Interviewed by Rolando Liriano, 17 and Eric Zamora, 18**

Florida's juvenile violent crime arrest rate is 43% above the nation [757 per 100,000 youths in 1992].

Kim

Kim, 13 [illegible]

It looked like any other suburban home. It was beautiful and the girls pretty much had freedom there. They were seen sympathetically and not as criminals and enemies of society. ■ Kim has basically brought up her brothers and sisters 'cause her mom was a drug addict and a dealer. She was stabbed by her mom and shot once because of a drug deal, but she didn't go to the hospital, she just let it heal. To be physically and mentally that strong, and to know that your mom isn't there when you could have died, you've got to be really alone. That must be a scary feeling. ■ People handle things in different ways. Kim is also a gang member. She talked very straightforwardly. She told us exactly what was going on. But she had a caring side. She wants to be a police officer when she grows up so she can be a role model for the kids—something the police in her neighborhood never were. Kim seems to have a grasp on who she is and what she wants. She is such a strong personality. ■ Suki Cheong and Libusha Kelly

I was born in Las Vegas. I was down in Vegas all my life.

I've been a ward of the state for about seven to eight years. The reason was because of abuse in my family. And I've just been through foster home to foster home to foster home.

My real parents was no good because they were drug addicts and stuff like that. You never know what happened when you were asleep. You got people running in and out of your house selling drugs and everything.

My mom she would say she don't have money and everything. My mom is a big liar. She'll tell us that she don't got diddly, you know, and then she'll come out every weekend with these thousand dollars. My mom really don't give a rip about us. She sits there and says she loves us, and all. Well, all she really does is think about those drugs and everything. I had just given up saying, "Police, come and get me," 'cause I couldn't take any more. I didn't know what would happen to me.

All my sisters and brothers got taken away. My twin sisters—all of them. My Mom's on her way with triplets, and now she's saying she wants to keep them. She's gonna keep her kids that she's gonna have and leave us where we are. That's not fair to us, because we should be with our mom just like the newborn kids are, too. You know, that's rude.

I have nothing to do with my mom. No way. The way that I feel is I have no need to go back there. No, she ain't gonna treat me with respect. I was the only one that was picked on in my family. The only one. I remind her of my daddy. I got fed up with it.

I'm the only one that raised six kids. My mom didn't do nothing. When her checks came in, I was the one to handle the cash, you know. I was the one who had to support food and a place to stay and make sure about baths and clothing. That was me. My mom didn't do nothing. All my momma did was sit around and fuck every person she sees, and was not home when we needed her. And she got mad just because stuff happened in the house. If she was there watching her kids, none of this would have happened.

I don't love my momma, because of what she put me through all those years. So therefore I have nothing to say with her until she's on the right track.

My biggest fear is, one of these days, I'm gonna lose my temper, and I'm gonna kill my mom. Every time I see her we get into arguments. That's not right, for a parent to get into arguments. We was talking and all of a sudden, "I'll whip your ass," and this and that.

You know, if you're on drugs, you're out of your mind. You don't know nothing. I'm ready for her to walk up on me any day, because I'll make sure she would be put in the ground.

I grew up around a lot of gangs. That's where I came from.

I got raised being in a gang. And I would never have gotten involved in gangs if my momma didn't treat me the way she did.

Gangs started off at school, you know, whooping everybody's butt, getting into a lot of fights. Like me, I'm a fighter, and when somebody says smart to me, I cuss them out, I beat their ass, I'll do anything.

The gangs, in a way they're good, and in a way they're not, because they do bad things and in another way they do good things. I ain't the kind of person that goes and sell drugs, you know, all that kind of stuff. You can hang with them, and the stuff that you don't like they're doing, you just drop them and don't do it.

I didn't care if I was to get in trouble. All the fights I got in, you ain't talking about punching, pulling hair, you talking about

While the [illegible] juvenile violent crime arrest rate rose 50% between 1985 and 1991, the rate for [illegible] rose 19%.

their ass end up in the hospital bed. And so there ain't nobody messing with me 'cause they know I'm a good fighter at school.

I have to get the anger out somewhere. You know I can't take it out on people for the rest of my life. So I have to deal with it.

I would like to first get off the state, you know. And go to college and get a degree. Education would be more important to me than anything, because I'm not a perfect reader. I didn't know how to read until I got in the state, and I'm slowly working on doing my math. You know, I was dumb.

In our school, I never paid attention. I was always in trouble, so therefore, I'm slowly knowing how to read and math—all kinds of stuff like that. I knew math, I snapped right in it, but reading problems is one of my most problems. Most of these kids on the street, that's their most problem is reading. And that's what you're going to need when you grow up and when you sign papers and fill out applications and stuff like that. And you have to know all that.

My most favorite job is cops, you know, to nail people on what they're doing. Not just to go beat them, to show them that they shouldn't be doing this. Most cops out here, they really don't care, they'll bust you for anything. So, you know, I want to be a good model to people, when I'm a cop on the streets. If it takes me like a couple of months to go to school or whatever, I'm gonna do it... if I ever make it to that day, 'cause you never know, you could die any day now.

I might even start a group when I'm a cop and bring a lot of kids in, talk to them and everything. Say, "You shouldn't be doing this." You know, to be a model. Most cops don't do this, you know, they really don't care. If they need a place to stay, I would help them find a place to stay—clothing and all that kind of stuff—to get them on the right track.

And after that I might retire and then go on to be a lawyer, you know.

So, my motto is to get up grown and to start off as a cop, and then later on get married. Don't fall under those guys that divorce you. Find a good guy, you know, and probably after I have a couple of kids, retire and spend a couple of times with my babies and stuff. So I got it all planned out.

And I might just cut it all out and be a rapper and do singing.

■ Interviewed by Suki Cheong, 16 and Libusha Kelly, 17

Eddie

Eddie, 12 [illegible]

Eddie is unlike the typical seventh grader. At an age when most kids' thoughts of the future don't exceed junior high, he not only has thought about his long-term future, but knows exactly what he wants out of life. He has a sense of values. The things most important to him are security, comfort, a sense of belonging and pride. His family and friends are a large part of his feelings of security. ■ I left the interview with a sense of hope, because Eddie is willing to work for what he wants. ■ Chanda Boyden

I'm going into seventh grade. I'm very involved in sports—baseball and hockey especially, and then football. Those are my three things. I like to read, mostly probably mysteries and science fiction. I love to draw—it's one of my favorite things. And I love to spend time with my friends, go to the beach and stuff like that.

I'm a single child. I live with my mother and my father. I admire my father. He is a clerk of the court, and he's really involved in law, and everything like that. I'm really involved in the law and I'm proud of what he does. I want to be a lawyer when I grow up. I just got into it. It runs in the family. I'm just watching my father, learning from him.

Every Saturday or Sunday, most of my family goes down to my grandmother's; we all get together. It's a big family, there's always a party or a wedding coming up, so we're usually around each other pretty much. My family makes me feel secure and everything.

I like where I live. My town is very small. It's about a mile all the way around, and everyone knows each other and we feel secure. I like the way my house is. It's over 150 years old. I feel comfortable. Really just my family has lived there my whole life, and it feels like you sit there and it's somewhere you belong. I'd like to keep it in the family. It's something that has been passed down generation to generation.

Really my town is small. I like it that way, 'cause everyone knows each other. I mean you could take everybody in the town together, and there would probably be not one person that I wouldn't know. I know everyone, and we're all close.

Sometimes, there's occasionally stuff, shootings sometimes, but not really big. Probably, like every two, three years something happens. I feel real safe in my neighborhood.

Every town has crimes. Every community has crimes. I mean, Charlestown is a rowdy town. The whole town is full of kids. Kids in there think they're real tough guys, and there's always fights—but nothing really like shootings or with knives. No one really would do anything to hurt each other, but kids conflict and everything.

Sometimes stuff does happen. I think it was a year ago, there was a friend I knew, he was riding down a street on his bike. He didn't have his brakes fixed, and he got hit by a car and he died. It was a real bad experience. It was an accident. The driver never saw him coming. ■ **Interviewed by Chanda Boyden, 16 and Erin Cox, 17**

Tram, 18 *Bridgeport, CT*

Tram is Vietnamese, 18 years old with long black hair, she wore jeans and a regular shirt. She was calm and kind of had an accent. Her voice was a little low. She told us about her family, how they escaped from Vietnam, how the communists took her father away and she didn't know him for six years. And she didn't sound bitter or angry about it. She is open-minded and tries to see the good in everyone, she doesn't put everyone down. She has problems, but she overcomes them. She probably could change a lot of things. ■ Osiris Adorno and Chrystal Dunbar

I'm from Vietnam, right. And I don't know if you heard about the boat people. Well, we escaped. That's, like, really scary to me. Because I think I was seven and we had just lost my uncle because of the escape. So a couple of months later we decide to, like, escape again. And it was scary because I didn't want to lose any more of my loved ones. And I was a stupid kid, 'cause I knew what what was going on—my parents trying to protect me, and saying, "Oh, we just going on a fishing trip," and all this stuff. But I knew what was going on. And it was at night. And we got in a boat and we went out and supposedly the big boat was supposed to pick us up, right. But hours passed by, and nothing happened. Everything was really quiet. And you just sit there and you can imagine the tension and the anxiety. So it was just scary.

And my mom was so frightened. And when I was sitting there and she was clenching to me and I was scared because I didn't know what happened to my dad, 'cause he was the one who was supposed to pick us up.

Hours passed by and I was scared, because after the Vietnam War, the communists took my dad away. They took him away for six years. And we only known each other for two or three years since he came back, and I didn't want to lose him, you know. So that's my worst fear, losing him and losing my uncle who was on the big boat...and that the communists gonna catch us and gonna put us away.

A lot of good things have happened to me. I think the best thing that happened to me was coming here. Having the opportunity to be whoever I want to be, to accomplish whatever I want to accomplish without any barriers. Yeah, I think that's the best thing.

It wasn't that bad when I first moved there, around five, six years ago. It was, like, really good. I mean my street was nice, peaceful, quiet, you know. But gradually it seems like people moved away, 'cause there's too many violence.

Personally, I think I live a relatively protected life, you could say. I go to school, do after-school activities, go home, so I rarely see a lot of problems. But I heard about it. You know, every time you open a newspaper there's something about it.

My street is relatively OK. There's a lot of car thefts. My dad's car got stolen, like, two or three times. But the streets surrounding my street is pretty bad.

I think it's a couple of years ago when I opened the newspaper and there was this picture of this kid. He looked so familiar. It seemed like I had seen him somewhere before. Then I found out we used to go to elementary school together, and it was a shock, because he's dead. You know, he got shot. I think it was my first personal contact with somebody that got murdered or shot.

It was scary because I have a little brother and he's at that age when he's belligerent and he wants to fight all the time. So part of me was, like, really scared for my brother.

We feel unsafe. My parents were planning to move, 'cause my brother was being harassed around the street when he come home from school. My parents are really scared that something's

gonna happen to my brother. And it was scary because my brother even went out and, I don't know where he got it from, but he got a gun. You know, that was really stupid. But he got a gun and my dad found out about it. So you could imagine, they were, like, so shocked.

So it was, like, we wanted to move right away. But then, certain financial circumstances, we couldn't.

I go to a school where it's relatively diverse, and I learned how to interact with different people. It helped me grow, you know, it helped me to become who I am right now.

My parents have ideas of what's going on, you know, but I don't think they have a clue. My parents work like crazy, they work most of the time. They work seven days a week.

They're great, you know, but I think they live in a dream world. It's, like, all you have to do is just take care of yourself and, you know, you get more money and you try to get out of your neighborhood if you don't feel safe, that's my parents' attitude.

If they don't feel safe they just want to get out of Bridgeport. They live in a very provincial life. What affects them immediately, that's what they worry about, not the neighborhood. They live in a very different world, a different culture. And they try to hold on to their culture as tenaciously as possible. And they don't want to let go. You can't expect somebody to be Americanized when they lived in a country that's, like, totally different from the United States.

But they're not narrow-minded. If I'm angry or if I feel hurt about certain things, I can talk to them and they try to understand, you know. Sometimes they're a little hesitant because they don't want me to be too Americanized.

They tried very hard to meet my needs and to be there for me and to understand what I'm going through because of the cultural clash and everything. So I do get along with my parents fabulously, I think. Well maybe not all the time, but you know.

I think my childhood is good. I think, boring. I wish I could be a little more carefree. Like, I don't have to worry too much about the future. I think it will be easier for my children than it's for me, because, like I say, there's a lot of stuff about cultural clash and other stuff. But I can say that my parents was there for me every step of the way. And I hope I will be there for my children.

▬ Interviewed by Osiris Adorno, 17 and Chrystal Dunbar, 16

Don

Don, 15

Don is 15, tall, very skinny, and strong. He has blond hair in a military-style crew cut, and wore a purple T-shirt, and jeans. He said he loves school and gets good grades. ▬ He looked anything but forbidding, but under this facade of small-town innocence, there was an unending spirit of violence that we had not suspected. He likes to hunt. He likes to chase animals, shoot them, and watch them die. He also feels the need to do the same thing to a person. ▬ Don seemed to be two people fighting for attention—a normal teenager and a would-be predator.
▬ Lisa Schubert and Ben Young

I have five people in my family. My mom is my favorite person. She buys me everything. She spends a lot of money on me.

In our family, it's very interesting. We have fights usually all the time—pretty much step-dad, my mother and myself. My step-dad, I don't know if I can say this, but he's a dick. We've lived together for eight long years. I have a little two-and-a-half-year-old sister who always gets me in trouble. Blames me for stuff I didn't do. I don't like her. I used to like her, but not anymore. She's a little brat. Everybody thinks she's so cute, but she says words that I can't even say—at least and get away with—and they think it's cute. So she's a little brat, and I don't like her.

I'm going to join the Marines. Everybody in my family, except my mother, is in the Marines—or at least they're in the Army, or some form of the forces. I just figured I'd carry on the tradition. In ten years, hopefully I'll be a higher ranking officer in the Marines, still, and have some combat under my belt, hopefully. I admire anybody that's brave enough to go into war. I hope that I get the chance to.

Combat's interesting, the strategy. Trying to have more experience than the enemy. Knowing that whoever is better trained is going to win, and the other person dies.

If it means keeping the United States alive, I'll do whatever's necessary. Anything. Risk my own life. That's what happens in a war—people die.

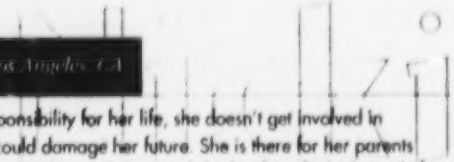
You won't feel it if you get blown up. Instant death, just like that. Drop an A-bomb, you won't feel anything. You disintegrate.

I find death very interesting, just watching it happen. I love death environments. It's interesting. After you pull the trigger, your adrenaline's flowing.

If someone I knew got shot, I'd kind of be more apt to want to kill to get revenge.

I like hunting. I've been hunting for years, just shooting rabbits and squirrels and stuff.

My step-dad hates guns, because he was in a war. I'll always like them. ▬ **Interviewed by Lisa Schubert, 13 and Ben Young, 12**



Nicki, 14 *Los Angeles, CA*

Nicki takes responsibility for her life, she doesn't get involved in situations that could damage her future. She is there for her parents and her younger brother and she stands by her friend who has a kid. Her brothers, on the other hand, have joined gangs where you automatically have a lot of friends and people to protect you. Like Nicki says, they've taken the most attractive route without looking ahead to what might happen or thinking about how it might affect their family. They seem to take responsibility for no one, not even themselves.
▬ **Galen Moore**

My dad, he loves working on cars, and mom, she takes care of our children and she just got a job. I don't know where it's at, though I forgot.

We used to live in Bakersfield. L.A. is much harder than Bakersfield, and there's more people and more traffic, and more problems. You always have to watch your back and make sure nobody is breaking inside of your car here in L.A. Day before yesterday, our car been broke into. Then today when we went out to our car somebody broke into it again. So now we got to pay more money and get an alarm to make sure that nobody breaks into it again.

The other night I looked out of my window from my room and there was a car that stopped at a red light and another car had drove and there was some shots, but I didn't know if it was directly at that car or somebody else. There's a lot of shooting. You hear the cars crashing or gun shots shooting, but we don't know if they're playing around or firecrackers or other things.

I used to have a lot of friends in gangs. Instead of me going to school, I used to go with them. But now it's like I need school, all I could get. Since I've been in school, I've been doing very well, and getting As, Bs and Cs. I don't hang around people like that no more, 'cause I found out that all they do is get you into trouble, get you involved with the law in a negative way. Instead of going to school and doing good things, they drop out. They don't become nothing in life, be drug dealers or drug addicts and their life isn't worth anything any more.

I have eight brothers and all of my brothers are in gangs except one. The one that isn't in a gang, he's picking up things from my older brothers, but he likes hanging around me and I be telling him another story. So all my brothers are in gangs except one. One of them have got shot in the stomach, but it was in an accident because they was playing with guns. They all carry guns because they say that if something go down and somebody want to fight them, they got to blast on them.

The way that they chose friends, they wanted to be popular and they wanted to get a lot of attention from their friends or from school when they did go, and then they found out that you can get more respect and more challenges if you be in a gang, you have more friends, you know a lot of people. You got people on your side to help you fight and stuff. That was probably why my brothers are in gangs to this day.

It's not always the parents' fault. It's the kids' faults, but then the parents got to choose the friends that the kid or the kids should be around, and the kids got to be responsible enough to take their responsibilities and knowing what's good and bad. Their parents do have a hard time guiding kids because kids are hard-headed. You tell them, "Don't go over there," and five minutes later they're doing it. I just feel that all my homies and my cousins that are dead now, they should have thought more about it, and they should think of life and death and how they want to live.

My brothers sell drugs. I'm sure they do. I was like, "If you are man enough to go out there and sell drugs, you're man enough to get killed or get shot at."

My brothers are crazy and they haul off and shoot anybody that mess with their family. But then, it ain't right, 'cause they ain't

helping their family. They're hurting themselves by shooting or killing somebody else, 'cause they end up in prison and we got to get the money to bail them out.

I feel like my parents think they're going to give up because they're scared at night when my brothers ain't at home. They're thinking about if they got shot, if they killed, if they in a drive-by, if they're doing a drive-by, or if somebody's beating them up, or something. So I just stay by their side as much as possible and try to do my best in school to show them that I could become somebody. Me and the girls and my little brother, they could become somebody.

I never carried a gun. I used to carry knives in elementary, 'cause, I mean, it was kids that had guns and knives and stuff. In the elementary they'll never check you, and the only way you get caught with it is if you tell a friend and a friend tell another friend and it gets back to the teacher. Besides that, you would just have it.

It makes you feel a little safer because kids used to run up on you with knives and say, "I cut you," just over little stupid stuff—like if you push a little boy, you're running and you knock over a little boy and he start crying, you be like, "I'm sorry," and keep on running. Then that little boy might go back to their cousin and tell him that, and that cousin will start something. They always got a weapon up on them. So if you have one, it's like, "So, who can win?" ■ **Interviewed by Galen Moore, 15**

Patrick

Patrick, 17

Anything the streets could dish out was much better than the hell Patrick experienced at home with a roof over his head. He had been on his own since he was nine, 'cause he had no place to stay. He'd gotten through what he had to get through and didn't show many feelings. But when he talked about being abused by his father, by his stepfather, and at school, I saw his eyes water. He went through this bully stage where he realized, "I'm getting beat up so everybody's going to get their ass kicked". Most people are most afraid of death; what frightens Patrick is growing up and becoming a monster, a mirror image of his parents. ■ This interview really blew me away. So much of it was about opening up, and yet he still seemed to keep it back. When I finished interviewing, I had to stop. I've never had to stop a tape recorder just to breathe. It was just amazing. ■ Ivan Antoine and Fedley

I've been on my own, basically, since I've been nine. My mother gave me away to the state. The state took me away for abuse from my parents—mental, physical and even sexual abuse by my mother's boyfriends.

Before the state could take me away, my mother said, "I can't handle him, why don't you keep him?" That way, the state couldn't go back and get my three brothers without going through court, since they didn't testify in wide open and say, "I'm being abused."

It started as young as I can imagine. For the longest time I didn't say anything to anybody. Just recently I got back with my mother, and I mentioned that to her. She said that she had no clue that it was ever happening before, but many family members came to her and told her that it was happening. But she still didn't do anything.

I feel awkward because I feel no love for my mother. You know what I mean? I feel that natural devotion to my mom, because she's my mom, but caring, or love, or whatever you can call it, I don't feel that for her. I don't think she treats me like another human being, or that she's got feelings for me, or anything like that. I really don't think so.

I've adjusted and got used to the shelters and halfway houses. I've lived on the streets and everything else. When I first came into the system, it was kind of scary and unusual to me. So it was kind of awkward then, but now, it's just a standard way of living for me.

The first two nights on the streets was very hard—in and out of stores stealing candy bars for something to eat. Finally I had to ask a friend if I could stay there, it was so cold, in the middle of the winter. I just had to ask, you know, and tell him what's wrong, so I could stay there. He understood, but the next day I took off again. And I was living back on the streets and doing a lot of walking and thinking of where I could go next.

In a way, I know it's wrong, but I have in the back of my mind that every person should get really beat once—that it changes their outlook on life. And I know that's a mean thing to say, but there's no other way for a person to learn not to do it to others, or know exactly how a person feels afterwards. And your entire outlook on life is different. When I'm in the grocery store or something like that, and I see a parent grab their kid real quick and throw them into the grocery cart and give them a little whack, flashbacks just run through my head, and it just drives me nuts.

I remember the first time I said I was going to kill myself and I was a little tiny kid, I think I was, like, seven. My father was a musician and he had this big speaker system and I said I was going to reach my hand in the back and electrocute myself to death. But one of my mother's boyfriends were home at that time, and he just threw a knife at me and said, "Well, do it the right way." And I remember taking it. My mom was standing there right at the same time. I remember I wanted to just slit my wrist open or something, just to say, "Ha ha, I bet you didn't think I was going to do it." But I just couldn't permit myself to do it.

Like I said, there was times when I thought since I got beat I should beat everybody else up. And now I get so mixed up, because it depends on what I'm feeling like during the day. If I'm in a bad mood, I feel like I should get hit that day, just subconsciously, I just feel like I need some pain today. And the next day, I'll just wake up just feeling, I don't know, depressed—total depression. And there's other days when I'll just wake up in the morning in a terrible mood—a mood where if anybody just said something to me that I didn't like, I felt like I could just mash their head into a wall. And I guess, through all this, it just makes my feelings mixed up, and I can't even predict what I'm going to be even a day ahead of time. I have no schedule of feelings.

I'm sure being sexually abused affected me, because I got sexually active very young. I remember nine is when I actually majorly got sexually active—not had sex directly, but going around in my brain, playing with the neighbor next door—and I think that's why I started out so early. I don't know what I'd be like if I didn't get sexually abused.

When I lived on the streets, in my stupid crazy days, I got a girl pregnant. And I cheated on her with another woman. And I got them both pregnant. And she found out that I cheated on her. And she didn't know what to do with the baby. So, she kind of killed herself. I don't know if it was due to that I cheated on her or due to not knowing what to do with the baby. And ever since then, I would never kill myself. The pain that goes along with other people is just too great. I wouldn't do it to anybody else.

I really don't know what happened to the other girl. She did have the baby, but I was off the streets then. And I was 13 then, so the baby would probably be about three years old right now, somewhere around there. It is a boy. I've never seen it, I don't even know where she's at right now. But I haven't heard anything about it in over two years.

I would like to see the baby. I'm really mad at myself now, 'cause, like I said, I never wanted to have kids until I was absolutely sure of what kind of parent I'd be. But at that time, I wasn't really thinking of the future. I was just a person who was mad at the world and just do whatever the heck he felt like.

I know it's a terrible thing to say, but I don't think I ever really had any major feelings for her. But I had feelings, major feelings, for the girl who committed suicide.

I could never say, "No, I didn't want to help the child grow up," and live with myself afterwards. Whether I wanted to or not I would feel I have to.

I'm not in school any longer, 'cause I moved down to Hartford, Connecticut, right before mid-terms, and I came back up for finals. The school wouldn't accept me, or anything like that. I really want to get into college. But as it is now, I'm 17 and going to be a sophomore. If I stay back and I can't get into the higher grade, I'll be *22* in my senior year. So, that kind of makes me think whether to get my GED and just try to get into college. Right now, I'm not enrolled in any schools.

I'm trying to get ahold of my social worker and a school counselor and figure out the best way to get through school and have options of trying to get into colleges or something like that. If I keep moving around it'll be impossible for me to finish high school. I'm very discouraged about it.

I'm going to try as hard as I can to get into college. I think I'd really like to work with kids, younger kids. I get along with young kids very well.

Every night I just lie down and just emotionally just let things out. While my mind's going over what I intaked for the day and as I let all these things out it implants in my head exactly how much little things really bother me through the day. Or what a normal person would take as an every day life. I just don't. And, I don't know, it's a real weird feeling.

When it comes to dreams, I think this a part of my dreams are, I think, about the future, and what I could be—a neat little musician, or somebody everybody else likes and doesn't want to ignore anymore. But then, there's a part where the past comes in and mixes up with the future, and it just gives me a real cold feeling. And then, when I wake up in the morning, I feel like I'm just waking up to an entirely different day—but already somebody's just labeled me as a misfit somebody wants to ignore.

Every day it kind of gets to me. I'm wondering if somebody's going to be able to push the right button and have me explode. And then, right then, I know if I can't control that I'm no better than my parents ever were. ▬ **Interviewed by Ivan Antoine, 16 and Fedley, 17**

Dominic, 13 *Newark, NJ*

Dominic is Hispanic, very light-skinned. He is kind of heavy-set and his head was shaved. He was wearing baggy jeans and black boots. He's had to grow up in a neighborhood and an environment that is basically violence. His mother's husband would always start fights with him. I think his entire life he's always been on guard and he's been ready to be violent and nobody's discouraged that at all. ▬ He is pretty much like a hood, except for the fact that he was totally uncon-frontational with me, not trying to glamorize the violence, just telling it matter-of-factly, which has its good and bad points. ▬ Fedley

I ran away for one day because we had problems in my house. My mother's husband, my mother always thought it was all about him. Everything was him first, and Dominic had to be the last one in the family.

So I wasn't treated fairly, so I got sick and tired of that already. So then, me and my mother's husband got into an argument. It sounds like, "Who you screaming at, you ain't my father. You just came in this house, like, three months ago and you gonna come over here and scream at me, man?"

So I told him, "Back up with that, yo, 'cause, you know, I might look small but I still throw up the hands with anybody." So he was like, "I don't give a fuck." I was like, "Well, neither do I." So then he was drinking coffee and he threw the cup in the sink and it broke. So my mother put up her hands and hit me with the telephone wire. I just grabbed her hand and pushed her out of the way.

I already had my bags and everything ready and I had my little stash out the window hanging with ropes, so all I had to do was cut the rope, grab it and jet. So I just grabbed, cut it and left, and I end up in my Uncle Tito's house.

I stood there for, like, almost a month. Then the social workers came and got me. They was like, "Do you want to go back with your mother?"

So, you know, I figure a mother's the best thing you could have in your life, because when she passes away you gonna regret it. You gonna need her, you know what I'm saying? So I was like, "All right I'll go back with my mother." So I went back with my mother.

A couple of days later, she messed up again with me, thinking it was all about him again. I got into a fight with him. He was like, "You a pussy, you a punk." So, I was like, "Oh, so that's how you want to do it now?" So I picked up a big machete to hit him with it. Then my mother got in the way. She was, like, "No, Dominic, don't do it, don't do it." Then he had put up his hands to hit me. So, you know, I was like, "All right, I ain't even gonna do it, I ain't gonna do it like that." So I just stopped.

And then, the next thing you know, I just went wild, because my mother told me that I was going to get locked up until I was 18 years. I was like, "What? I don't want to talk." She swore to God her father. And you know, when my mother swears to God her father it's usually true.

So then, right there, everything got into a fight. I broke my windows. I picked up my bureau; I threw it against the wall. I was punching holes through the wall with my fist. My hand was bleeding. And I just went wild in the room. And I told my mother, "Don't come in this room, don't come in this room, 'cause I might go wild on you." So she didn't go in the room.

You can say the SWAT team was outside just for me. Like, five cop cars. And, like, "What the hell is this? It's only me!" Damn.

I just went outside and I got locked up. They put me in this place, they called it the shelter. So they put me in there. I was in there for a while. ▬ **Interviewed by Reniqua Allen, 12; Fedley, 17; and Lisa Taylor, 16**

Hector, 10 *Fort Worth, TX*

Hector is a young African-American male with a little baby face—had his shirt tucked in and everything. He had to decide which group he wanted to follow—the people going in the straight path or the people who deviated from that path. And you know, he was just confused. Some of the people he looks up to, his cousins especially, are doing the wrong things and he wants to be just like them. ▬ He sort of reminded me of myself sometimes, I had to decide when I was young which group of people I wanted to follow. I chose to go down the straight path. I think his being in a program has helped him decide to go the same route that I chose. I just wish him luck. All the young people out there in our nation who are going through the same thing, I wish them luck too. ▬ Mark Jennings

My name is Hector and I like to play football and basketball. I'm ten years old. I like to listen to my rap, all different kinds, and pop and stuff like that.

I like to keep on the go a lot. I can't stay in the house a lot. If I stay in the house for 15, 20 minutes I get frustrated. I've got to get outside the house.

I stay out until about 9 or 10 o'clock. When I get into junior high it's gonna be later. Me and my friends go out on our bikes somewhere. Ride around the neighborhood. It depends; sometimes we go to a store and hang out in front of the store, or go out to the arcade or go play some baskets. Then at 10 I go home and go in the house.

This is one of the areas a lot of dope dealers be at and they be carrying guns and having shootouts. A lot of gangs, gang members and everything. A lot of trouble breaks out here sometimes, like with the police. A woman got raped over by the playground a couple of weeks ago. Police got killed out there at the park. Just a lot of killings and different stuff.

People like to jump on and beat up on people down here. But you gotta learn to protect your own self if you wanna make it down here. I protect myself! I don't want nobody jumping on me!

There's a couple of people I know of in gangs. They hang out, smoke cigarettes, drive in cars—you know just the basic things that a gang does.

I wanted to be in a gang. I did, sort of, I did. All my friends are in it and stuff. But I've started thinking about it now. At first I wanted to be in a gang, but then I just changed my mind. I don't wanna be in the middle of all that fighting but, if I have to, I will.

You can't join in and then jump out! And they go through the trouble of beating you up for nothing. You can't get out. The only way you gonna get out is if you die. Less someone kills you, something like that, that's the only way you can get out.

It's what you want to do. You make your own decision if you want to, you know, be in a gang. It's your own decision. They'll respect me for what I am, if I'm in a gang. If I ain't in a gang, they just ain't gonna say nothing, they just gonna walk right off. I don't wanna stand out there and sell dope or nothing like that. I ain't gonna sell no dope.

I had three role models: my cousin, my uncle, and Michael Jackson.

My cousin, I walked in his footsteps, but he died. Now I've gotta try to walk like my cousins and uncles and stuff. The one I tried to follow, he drowned about a year ago. In a lake. I tried to follow his footsteps, but now I can't. He ran track. He didn't do that kind of stuff, gangs. He was 19...20?

My uncle's dead now. He was in something like a gang. He was in the Mob...the Mafia. You know the people that sell dope? He had those people sell dope for him; he didn't even have to get out on the street; they sell stuff and bring in the money. You know what I'm saying?

Michael Jackson! He was my role model. I like the things he do! He sings and everything; he sings pop. He donates money to the poor... I think he's a good role model.

Both my mother and father are my role models. They'll always be my role models. No matter what happens they're gonna be my role models.

You know, I almost went to juvenile delinquent, about third grade—two years ago. I went for a teacher to stab him with a butcher knife. He had made me mad the other day.

He would let a little girl do anything, almost anything she wants to do and I got mad; everybody almost got mad. And everybody else, man, he was just like, "You ain't nothing to me. I'll teach you but you ain't nothing to me." I just got mad. I felt like I wanted to do something. I had him on my mind. So I brought a knife to school. We don't have no metal detectors in school, I had it in my backpack. I didn't pull it out; somebody caught me with it. It was in my bag, and I was unzipping my backpack, and somebody looked inside my backpack and seen the knife.

I got sent home. And I had to go to court. I had to go for a hearing. They said I had a chance to go to juvenile living for about two years. I guess I'm just lucky; I got off the hook.

Whew, man! I didn't really want to go there. I didn't want to be with those bad kids!

Everyone needs to stop killing each other; it ain't right to kill your own people. We need to learn how to live straight and to tie your life back around. Make the world a better place.

■ Interviewed by Mark Jennings, 16

Denise, 17 *San Francisco, CA*

Denise sounded like she learned a lot from living on the streets. I guess she's still learning. Maybe after she learns enough, she'll be able to look back on it and decide which way to go. ■ After the interview I got to go to a house with plenty of food, but she's got to think about panhandling or trying to find someplace to stay. I've never felt I wanted to condone drug use with anyone, but hearing Denise, I thought, well, if this is a way for her to get away from her life for a little while, maybe I can understand.... Why should she have to live this way? ■ Lisa Sohn

I'm on the streets 'cause my parents are drug addicts and I lost everything. It all went up their arms and it's all gone now.

I was always being hit and, like, I was always told, "I'm going to kill you; you're no good," and all that stuff, and so it was really bad. I never liked it, but I believed it. That was probably the scariest thing for me.

My parents didn't care and they were never home and I was, like, always alone so it was like I don't need them, so I left.

I think it's better on the streets. I take care of myself and I'm not abused by anybody and I don't have parents that always put me down.

I panhandle sometimes or I, like, ask people if they need help for money or whatever. I've sold drugs to make money. I had a

connection and I said, "Well, I want to be a dealer," and he goes, "OK, here you go." And I would sell, sell, sell, and then I'd say, "Well, here's your money," and he'd give me half and then he'd say, "OK, here's more to sell." And that's how I started. I've stolen. I never was like, "OK, I'm going to have to prostitute." I've never done that. I will never stoop that low, ever.

I stopped selling because I went to jail and it got too risky, so that's when I stopped dealing. In the past year I've been to jail seven times—for selling drugs and illegal weapons and assault. It scared me. It scared me really bad. I was like, "Oh, my God," you know.

Now, I panhandle and I work or whatever I can do to get it. It's hard but I do it.

I am very concerned about AIDS. I don't sleep with anybody. I'm tested every three months. It's all been negative and I think if it ever comes up positive I'll probably kill myself, 'cause I could never, ever, live with it. I'm at risk because I do drugs. It feels so good. I love it and it's like, well, I don't care if I'm alone because I can always have that drug to turn to.

My best friend is a heroin addict here in San Francisco and I was like, "I'll never, ever do heroin." Well, I did heroin for the first time five days ago and I loved it and it scared me. I was like, "Oh, my God," and he's like, "Here, try it, try it." I was like, "No, I don't want to," and he was like, "Come on." He's like, "I've known you 11 years." I said, "I know." He said, "Just try it." I tried it, and I loved it, and it scared me really bad, 'cause I'll keep doing it and doing it and doing it. So, I just say, "No, I can't. No, I can't. No, I can't." 'Cause it's not fun. I mean it is fun to a certain extent, and then it's old. And it's the same thing every day. It's like, "Oh, my God, I'm an addict." It goes on and on and on, and it's like, "Oh, I'll do anything for 'em," and I don't ever want to be like that. I have been sober now for four days.

Probably the hardest thing about living on the street is saying, "Where am I going to sleep tonight?" or if I'm going to have anything to eat today. You think, "Oh, my God, what am I going to do?" and you just hope and pray that something comes through.

I've had to sleep on the streets many times. I've went hungry many, many times.

Maybe kids leave home 'cause they think it's fun to be on the streets in a party and everything. Well, it's not fun. I wish a lot of people would have knocked some sense into me but they didn't, and I had to learn the hard way. I hope that all these other kids that are really young don't have to learn that way.

I am not really a caring person. It's like I don't care about any body else except me, because if I go around caring about everybody else and not caring about me, I mean, I don't know where I'm going to end up. So it's, like, I don't care, 'cause I'm all that counts. If I'm dead, I'm dead. I'll be in a lot better place.

I watched a lot of my friends get shot over the gang violence and I was like, "Damn," you know? But I was like, "Oh, well, I'll die one day and I will be with them." It's all about today, because I have no clue if I'm even going to make it till tomorrow.

I got my GED. It was really hard because it was, like, I was always in drugs and stuff. But I still made it to school, because it was like, "I'm not going to make it nowhere without education." I still made it to school. I don't know how I pulled through. I really don't, but I did it and that's all that counts to me. I have my GED and I have my education.

I have two children myself. I have one that's just turned four, and one that's almost a year. I just, like, you know, have them. Their father was killed in a drive-by shooting in Portland, St. John's. He was a gang member. I was like, "Oh my God, is he ever going to come home?" you know. Then it was like, boom, he was gone.

My kids live with my grandmother in Los Angeles. I called my grandma and I said, "Well, you can take them or I can put them up for adoption," and she has them. It's all for the better, I think, because I have nothing for them right now. So it's all for the best right now, I think. I don't know. I'd be a lot of trouble for my grandma. She's like—I don't know—I'd hurt her too much. I mean because, drugs, she's like, "I can't believe it," 'cause I'm the baby, you know. I'm like her pride and joy and it hurt her really bad. All she tells me is to be careful and to stay strong and that's it.

I've been alone my whole life. I'm like, "I've always been alone so why in the hell should I change now?" ■ **Interviewed by Lisa Sohn, 18**

Adam, 15

Adam looks about 20. He walks with a limp because he had gotten shot in the left kneecap. He had a big band-aid on his face from a fight. When he actually smiled, that made a big difference. ■ He seemed worried, always looking around. His mom, his grandmother and his younger sister all got shot by rival gangs trying to shoot him because he beat someone up. Every close person he related to has gotten shot because of him, so he thought it didn't make sense to have friends. You feel sorry for him because he wants to get out of the gang, but the only way out is death. On the other hand, he's a guy you'd like to kick because of all the stuff he did. ■ He seemed the most human when he said he kind of liked helping little kids—like there is something there for him, pulling him away from the gang. And here's a guy with nobody to help him out. ■ It never really occurs to him to think about the future because there is really no future. ■ Karis Horsford and Libusha Kelly

I'm down with a gang. We get into fights. It's kind of frightening, 'cause it's, like, jeopardizing your life. You can't really go nowhere by yourself, because of other people that you did stuff to. Like, me and my people, we beat someone up. He went back and told his people. Now, one day, they see me going to the movies or whatever. They got a gun. First thing they're going to think about is, "There's the one that beat me up." Then they go and come after me.

To get into the gang I had to do something that I didn't do before. Something to, like, show that I got heart. To show that no matter who it is, I'd be willing to fight. So I went to a guy's mom's house and beat her up. I beat the grandma up. I started throwing them on to the floor and I punched the grandmother in the eye and tied her up. Then I punched the mother. They never expected that it would come from me. The only thing that went through my mind while I was doing it was that they better include me in the gang or I'll get shot. The mother, her son was down with another gang, so I knew while I'm doing this that if they didn't include me in their gang that her son and his people would have come looking for me. Which they did.

You got to really watch yourself, you can't do nothing without being careful. Where you go to eat, you got to be careful. When cars are driving by, you got to be careful. We had a beef with another gang. They seen me and they just slowed up and started shooting. We shot at them, and they shot at us, but nobody really got hit. Another time I caught a bullet from a 12-gauge in my kneecap, that's why I walk kind of funny. The doctor said that it's gonna be like that for life. But that's how it is. It ain't no fun.

I thought about wanting to get out. As a matter of fact, I do want to get out. But this gang, once you got into it, the only way to get out is death. I know. I'm not afraid to die. I face death every day. Every day when I wake up, I face death.

I used to be a kid who loved to fight and loved to curse, and I didn't really care about cleaning nothing up or helping nobody with nothing. I was mostly a loner, it was always me by myself.

Now I'm getting into other things, like instead of fighting, I'm breaking up fights. I'm helping other individuals. Doing a lot helping outreach programs. One is to go around to different areas and give out condoms, teach youths about HIV and different kinds of diseases, how to protect yourself, where you can go if you need help, things like that. Mainly what we try to do is let them know that they're important. Like somebody cares, and that they're not alone.

The thing I'm most afraid of is probably losing what I got now. Not the gang, not the selling drugs, not the money, but maybe, like, the friends, the new friends I met. And outreaching and getting involved in different areas. You know, like helping kids. I like that a little. Honestly, a lot. I'd miss that.

Life is too short. Don't waste it over nonsense. ■ **Interviewed by Karis Horsford, 14 and Libusha Kelly, 17**

Linda

Linda, 17

Linda was very pretty and small. She was of Hispanic descent, light skinned. Her hair was pulled back and she dressed in the regular hip hop clothes that teenagers wear today—baggy pants, nice shirt, earrings. She looked young. She lives in a rough neighborhood so her mother just likes to keep her locked up when she wants to go out. It's this big struggle. ■ She can't even see the good in people anymore because when she looks around all she sees is violence. I don't think I could go through all the stuff she goes through—walking home and worrying about my life, just trying to get home from school.
■ Osiris Adorno and Chrystal Dunbar

I've lived in Bridgeport all my life. I live on the east side, and that's, like, the worst part. I live in a condominium complex across the street from the projects. Half the murders in the city of Bridgeport happen within, like, a five-block radius of my house. All the problems are moving toward my area, now. Whereas before I had to walk a couple of blocks to get into the middle of the problems, now, it's like the middle of the problems are almost on my doorstep.

I used to get scared at first. I used to be, like, "Oh my God!" and try to run inside and stuff. But it just gets to the point where you just don't care. As long as it doesn't happen to you, and, hopefully, as long as it doesn't happen to any of your friends, you just ignore it and keep going. But you mind your business. You keep walking.

I work on a lot of youth groups and stuff to try and hopefully solve this problem, but when it's right in front of you, you gotta just do your best to pretend it's not happening, 'cause if you get in the middle, you don't know what's gonna happen.

I think kids learn violence from what's happening around them, from TV, their parents, and just their environment. A lot of kids think that the only way they can fight back, or the only way they can defend themselves or fit in this type of neighborhood, is to act the same and to be like everyone else. I think that's basically where people learn violence from.

If being violent is the only way you're going to survive, then you're gonna learn it to survive, and to try to get out of the place where you're at.

You're not born violent, you learn how to be violent. You see violence on TV, and you see all these little super heroes getting shot and just walking right up and trying to kill everyone else. Especially when they're really young and they don't have someone to supervise them and tell them what's reality and what's not reality, kids get these little ideas in their head that it just can't happen to me.

My mother tries to keep me inside all the time. "Oh no, you can't go out," and duh, duh, duh. It's a hassle every time I want to leave the house. It's like, "Where are you going?" I have to call her when I get there. I have to call her when I leave. If I drop a friend off, my friend calls her to let her know I'm on my way home, so that she doesn't get worried.

I'm stubborn and I don't care. It could be someone on my street getting shot, and if I want to go out, I'm gonna find a way to go out, because I'm not gonna be stuck inside my house.

The scariest thing that's ever happened to me, up to now, was when I was walking home from school one day. When it's hot or at the beginning of the school year, me and my friend tend to miss the bus a lot—I don't know why, but we always do.

One day, neither one of us had enough money for both of us to get on the bus, so we decided to just walk home. When I walk home I have to walk through a section that's starting to get almost as bad as where I live. It was, like, 2:30 in the afternoon. And some kid had a gun. He looked like he was maybe 13 years old or 14 years old. This is two blocks away from my school, one block away from an elementary school.

The guy was with two other people, and he was trying to show off to his friends. I didn't see what he had or anything, tried to mind my business and keep going. And then, when I was walking he pointed the gun towards me. And he just, like, looked, and I looked over and he was looking at me. He had the gun pointed and I just kept walking like, "Oh, God, I hope nothing happens."

And all his friends were like, "Don't point it at her, don't point it at her. It's gonna go off, it's gonna go off." And I was like, "Oh my God, oh my God." So many thoughts are racing through my head, but my first thought was, "Just keep going and act like nothing's happening."

But when I got home I cried and I cried and I cried. I was like, "Oh my God, I could have been dead." My mother wouldn't have known what happened to me. She'd be yelling at me probably, yelling over my casket, why did I walk home? So that was, like, the scariest thing that ever happened to me.

Living in my neighborhood has made me angry and resentful. Sometimes I get so upset that I'll just sit down in my room and I'll just start crying. Sometimes I feel like, "Why do I have to live this way?" You cross a certain part in Bridgeport and you don't see the problems the way you see them when you go down my street.

And it just made me really resentful of how the government is not really trying to do anything about it. It seems like no one cares. I think the government knows what's going on. And I just think they don't want to do anything about it. I hate to sound racial about it, but it seems no one cares because it's happening to blacks and Hispanics. The area that I live in is predominantly black and Hispanic.

Before, when I was younger, I was a little more open-minded, because I used to live in a different part of town where it wasn't as bad as where I live now. So I think I was more apt to see the good in everyone.

But now, where I live, it's made me more narrow-minded sometimes—not all the time. But sometimes I just let my narrow side take over, and I don't realize what I'm saying until after I've said it.

It feels like sometimes I just have a chip on my shoulder.

I think the government needs to start working with kids in schools when they're younger—have classes, teach them violence prevention and conflict resolution—not wait until a kid is 16 years old, has been arrested for murder, and then try and rehabilitate him in a juvenile hall or something.

I think we need people to come in here and just sit down and sit in school, 'cause that's where you're gonna find the majority of kids. Unfortunately, they may not go there to learn, but they go to school 'cause that's where they feel safer than on the streets.

So we need people to go in there and sit down and say, "Well, let's have a class in conflict resolution. Let's have a class in handgun violence." They need to just do a whole violence curriculum...and self-esteem classes.

Now I don't think that money is just the answer. We need to be innovative and we need to be creative to try and get kids off the streets and back in school where they need to be.

I don't think any one adult knows what's going on in our mind. We need to get adults that are responsible—that are accountable to us. That if they're not doing their jobs you can say, "Hey, you're not doing your job. You need to get out of here," and let's find someone else that's gonna do their job and help us out.

I would get a lot of youth participation in how that money's going to get divvied up between agencies. And make sure it goes to agencies that are actually taking the time to listen to the youth. And I would get more recreation out there, just more teachers and people to give self-esteem classes, centers that are open for kids to go in after dark because there's nothing else around. I think the kids need to have a place to feel safe. And they need to feel wanted for anything to ever change.

I think the best thing that ever happened to me was having my mom's support for everything that I've done. And just having the life that I have. I mean, it's bad and everything, and sometimes I wish I didn't have it, but it's made me the person that I am. It's made me become more aware of what's going on around me.

You just have to keep your mind focused and not worry about how your childhood was. Just worry about your schooling and just go on from there. I know what can happen in the real world, but I can always have my little fantasy world in my head.

■ Interviewed by Osiris Adorno, 17 and Chrystal Dunbar, 16

Dropping Out

Hanging On

If somebody's putting you down, don't worry about it. It's hard to see at that time. The race isn't given to the swift, but it's given to the one who endures to the end.

Armon, 18 *Grand Rapids, MI*

When I finished interviewing him, I had to stop. I've never had to stop a tape recorder just to breathe.

Fedley, 16 *Children's Express, New York*

My freshman year, it was just like a slap in the face of reality, because for my seventh and eighth grade, I was on the honor roll, perfect attendance, I mean I was the stuff in eighth grade. But when I got to high school, it changed. People don't care, just, "You're here."

Lily, 15 *Chicago, IL*

Lily, 15, [illegible]

Lily

We went to Chicago to learn from kids what education was like in a big city. A professional-looking girl, who looked 30 years old, sat at the large, round table. She is a medium-sized girl, with long, black hair which was pulled back into a tight bun. ■ Her story was about her struggles maintaining her grades, and her likes and dislikes about school. ■ Lily's life-long dream is to be a Supreme Court justice. As she spoke to us, I thought to myself, I hope she is able to fulfill her dream. ■ Ilene Potasnik

I'll be a junior when school starts. My freshman year, it was just like a slap in the face of reality because for my seventh and eighth grade, I was on the honor roll, perfect attendance, I mean, I was the stuff in eighth grade. But when I got to high school, it changed. People don't care, just, "You here, you gonna be here," and all that.

So I had to calm down and realize that I had to go to class and learn stuff. As and Bs not just gonna fall in my lap. But sophomore year was OK because I kind of mellowed down and was in my books and stuff and brought my grade point average up, because it went down in my freshman year. My junior year is gonna be a lot better.

I wanted to say that if you don't learn, it's partly the teachers' fault, but it's partly your fault, too, because you have to want to learn. It's like, if you want to learn and the class is boring, you will learn. But, if the teacher makes the class more exciting, then you want to learn. You're looking forward to coming to that class fourth, fifth and sixth period. But when the class is boring, you're like, "Man, here come fourth period, gotta go to history, gotta go to geometry," or something like that. But if you're determined to learn, if you determined to make that A, that B or maybe that C because you already getting an F—but if you determined to make that grade and you want to make that good grade, then you will.

Where I go to school it's mostly white kids that go there and they make fun of me sometimes, 'cause I go to a white school. It's funny how people think about black schools and white schools because the same stuff that be going on in white schools go on in black schools. People, they be surprised when they hear that white schools, they got kids being stabbed and stuff in school, and violence and stuff. It's just that they hide it a lot better at our school than they do at other schools. And it happens a lot more often at other schools.

One thing that I would change is the decision that I made early on in high school, because when I first got to high school, I wanted everybody to know me and all that. I wanted to have a lot of friends, be popular and all that. In my freshman year, I was almost about to fail. I was cutting all my classes, and all the people I wanted to know me, that I wanted to be popular with and all that, they was passing but I wasn't.

So cutting classes and making the bad decisions I made freshman year, that's one thing I would like to change.

After high school, I'm going into the Navy for the minimum of nine years. And after that, I'm gonna go to law school. My dream at my profession is to be a Supreme Court justice.

I wouldn't want to live my life over again because some of the mistakes that I made in life, I probably would want to make them so I could learn from them. If I didn't make them, then I would never learn from them, so I would probably make them over and over again. ■ **Interviewed by Ilene Potasnik, 15 and Peter Ryan, 13**

Josh

Josh, 14 [illegible]

We interviewed Josh at a home for problem kids with no place to go. He was very withdrawn. He was very concise about what he said but he seemed as if he was trying to forget what happened to him. He remembered the facts, but he wasn't trying to experience the emotions. ■ Josh says that being abused by his parents has not helped him become tough—it actually weakened him because when he remembers those experiences, he can't face the challenges he has ahead. Maybe that's the reason why his entire being is about escape. He's all about moving around, escaping problems, escaping challenges. ■ He wants to go into the military because he says it would make him a tough person. ■ Ivan Antoine and Fedley

I ran away from home when I was 14, for physical abuse and mental abuse. I was the only one out of my brothers and sisters that decided that enough was enough. And I left on my own and ended up in the shelter. I depended on myself mostly.

Since I left my home, I'm kind of getting used to not staying at one place. I don't like to stay at one place; I like to be moved around a lot. It's kind of hard when you're living with two people that are supposed to kind of be your parents but you want them to be more of a friend. I just didn't see it that way, I saw them as parents, and parents kind of frighten me in a way. I just don't want to be around older adults for a long period of time.

I dislike my stepfather totally. He sexually abused my sister. He's physical abused me, and mentally—very mean. He would hit you around—out of the blue, you know, come home and just smack you around. We never got along at all.

My sister's 18 now and she's had two kids already. She don't want help, she wants everything to change. She just wants to forget everything that ever happened and she wants things to start over and for my mother and for her stepfather just to love her and be there for her right now. She's going through, like, a mental thing that she needs a parent for her right now. It's very sad on her part.

I don't make friends as easy as most people. I have a hard time talking, or asking them if you want to do something. It's made it easier coming to a shelter and getting involved with different people. I've always been on my own. I've always relied on myself, and friends just come hard for me, I guess.

It seems I'm afraid of just going outside or meeting new people. If you meet someone and it's a very nice person, you just don't want to get attached to them anymore. You just want to be friends for a little while, then move on. And the biggest fear is to find someone who cares for me and I really care for them, you know. Just get attached to them, then they'll probably do something wrong or I'll do something and I'll just leave again. That's how I escape through everything, is just by leaving the situation and not working it out with me or with them.

This year, I've been in almost four different schools. I missed quite a bit of school this year, which isn't very good for me, because I have a lot of school problems. I have a learning disability which makes it harder for me to read and write and stuff, so switching to different schools and not going to school much this year has really hurt me and grades and learning and stuff. So, I'm not even listed in school this year.

The last grade I finished was seventh. But I passed that, because I tried as hard as I could, and they felt that I might be able to make it through the eighth grade.

And when I went to a foster home, I had so much problems and stuff, so school was kind of blown away, even though I was in school. The school work kind of drifted off, and when I went to school I would just sit and think about things that happened. So it wasn't really being in school a lot.

I want to learn how to talk things out and be able to get closer with people and not for myself to jump from place to place. Just to try to find a place that I can just sit down and call home the rest of my life until, you know, I'm on my own. And by the time I'm on my own, I wish that I could deal with things a little bit better, you know, just live a normal life, and forget about the past, the things that have hurt me a lot.

Counseling's hard for me. I go in there and they just keep nudging at you and nudging at you until you just want to explode, you know. Instead of trying to help you with what you want to learn right now and *then* getting into things, they push back memories that you don't want to remember. I wish I could have a counselor that would just sit down and be my friend and talk to me and try to work out my problems—the problems that I think I have to work on the most. It really hurts inside, when you don't want to remember about it. ■ **Interviewed by Ivan Antoine, 16 and Fedley, 17**

Sharon

Sharon, 17 [redacted]

Sharon is real skinny. She has curly brown hair below her shoulders. She is extremely beautiful. Put her in the Miss America contest in a few years. She has this angel-like face, but there is a very big streak of sarcasm in her voice. ■ After she went to the very bottom by herself, she had to pick herself up. That's why she's so self-determined and very mature for her age. She's just hitting that point where she's moving on. ■ She's a go, go kind of person. ■ Scarlett Arias and Willa Lo

I am not in a regular high school. I am in a treatment center for drugs and alcohol. I moved here because I have a drug and alcohol problem.

I started doing drugs about three years ago. I dropped out of school. I started doing drugs, hit the streets, partied—basically messed up my life for three whole years. Ended up going to jail. I stared at walls for a long two-and-a-half months.

I think, maybe, it had to with my childhood growing up.

I've had a really rough childhood. It's a long story.

You know, a lot of stress, a lot of insecurity. Lack of attention, maybe, love. My mother and father separated and divorced and I was about a year old, I guess. My mother left. My father left the state. My mother left me with my grandmother. I lived with her for about three years and off and on during those three years my mother would come back and forth and get me. You know, bring me back.

I just had a real yo-yo type childhood. And then I guess after I got to know who my parents were, got to recognize my mom, my dad, I kind of wanted to be with them. You know, 'cause you know how you always want that mother and father figure. I just wanted to be with them. And I tried living with my mom. It didn't work out. She got married. She got pregnant with my little sister. Her husband was really nice at first, but then I was small. He didn't like us. He didn't accept me for who I was and for being, you know, my mother's child.

He used to be abusive towards us, things like that—or towards me, anyway. Favoritism of my little sister, basically. I took care of my little sister for them when she was probably eight to nine months old until she was three. I took care of her.

It just didn't work out. I couldn't handle being, you know, neglected or whatever. I just couldn't handle it, as small as I was. So I left and went back to my grandmother.

When I was living with my grandmother, it was really a strict background, I guess. Really strict. I wasn't allowed friends, or, God forbid, boyfriends. No activities, you know.

I wasn't allowed to participate in school activities, you know. Just simple things like basketball cheerleading, anything like that, I wasn't allowed. It was just like, "Why? What did I ever do that I can't participate? Why can't I be part of the clique, crowd or something?" So I turned to something else.

I never really paid attention in school. Not much of an interest for school. Just lack of concentration. Just wanted to be a part of the in crowd and never really was, so I didn't really care.

I had no one there actually making me feel confident with myself to be somebody. I was always told, "You know you're gonna be pregnant before you're 16," or, "You're never gonna amount to shit."

Drugs became available to me when I turned 15 and moved to the big city—Phoenix, Arizona—just got out, made new friends. And I think, maybe, one of the first friends I met was involved with drugs. So it was easy just being on the streets, making new friends in the inner city. It's real easy.

I hit the streets, I found friends that were doing drugs. And it seemed like they were having a good time and I just figured, "What the hell!" you know, I'll have a good time too.

That's when I got my DUI [driving under the influence]. For the first time I was working. I was an exotic dancer and I was coming home one night in my car, this car that I bought myself. I had been drinking all day and all night, and I got pulled over by the cops. I tried to run from the cops.

I was involved with drugs with an older man. And we had separated and I didn't really have a place to go, so therefore, I lived out of my car for about two, three weeks. I had all my things in my car. I went to jail, and I lost my car—it got towed off. And my things got stolen out of my car.

Well, I requested a treatment center because if I didn't, they were going to send me to a youth center for girls, a lock-down facility. So I requested a treatment center and the judge considered it.

I've been dry for three months, going on four. I smoke cigarettes, bite my nails a lot. That's about it. I think it calms me down a little bit. Really and truly, it doesn't work. You know, you always have this thought in the back of your mind where you know you gonna want to do drugs.

I've been out of school for three years so I'm just basically gonna say, stay in school. Get your education because a GED is not shit. Get your education.

Follow through with college if, you know, if you feel that's what's gonna bring you closer to someone. Or, you know, just basically do it for yourself. Do it for the money. Do it for yourself. Stay away from drugs, because they will totally screw up your life. They have wrecked mine. And just be your own person.

I see myself as a mortician. I really don't know why. It's just something I've been wanting to do for a while. Actually, I really don't know what they do. I'm getting information at this time on being a mortician. You prepare a body for the funeral services. Embalming them. Draining their bodily fluids. And all kinds of neat things like that. Preparing them for the funeral, basically, I guess.

And I'm now in an alternative school to get my GED and to follow through with college. They'll make sure you're going to school and that you have a job. They'll find you a job. They'll basically set you up to pay up to six months of your utilities and rent, find a place to stay. It's a good program if you work it. Now I'm working on getting my life straightened back out, so I can actually be someone in society today.

I think I'm just gonna take it one step at a time. One level at a time, day by day. Hopefully, in a year, I'll have my life together—on the right road, anyway. ▬ **Interviewed by Scarlett Arias, 14 and Willa Lo, 16**

Juanita

Juanita, 17 *Dallas, TX*

Juanita impressed me with her ambition and her sense of purpose. She has worked hard to improve her life and obtain her goals. ▬ Juanita uses her after school program as a refuge. She has mentors at home, at school and after school. They allow her to surround herself in positivity. Though she is not free of problems, she has people to talk them out with. She has role models whom she can look up to and admire, models to mold herself after. A role model is the most important thing a parent can give a child. ▬ Kristen Crockett

I'm a senior in high school. I was born in Mexico. I was there until I was nine years old. I came to Dallas when I was nine years old, and I've been here ever since. I like to write poetry and stories, and I play soccer.

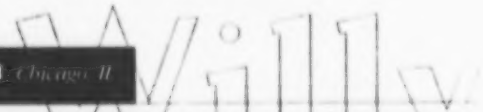
My ambition in life is to major in Latin American studies and go back to Mexico and be a lobbyist and just pressure the government, so they can invest more money in education.

Basically, this center is like a clinic, and it's for teenagers who don't necessarily have to have problems with your family, but just if you need tutoring. If you just want to come here and do your homework, you can come here. The reason that I come here for is my house. I live in an apartment, two bedrooms, and where I stay at, it's, like, open. It's a bit strange apartment. I can't concentrate, because there is a lot of noise—the television, my niece. So, I need a quiet place to study. I come here and use the room and just do my homework, and I also come here to see a counselor. I guess she is like a mentor, and we just talk about emotional problems.

I would say my mother and my grandfather are my role models. My mother, because she has never given up, and it shows me that no matter how hard you're going through something, you can't just say, "Oh, I quit." You know, "It's too hard." There's many more reasons why, but basically, that's the bottom line—because she has never given up.

My grandfather, because he gave me the morals and the values that I now have and carry with me.

My science teachers are role models because they're strict and they expect from you. I can compare them to other teachers, because I've had bad teachers. They just go in the room and take their profession as a routine. They really don't put their heart on their work anymore. I've had teachers who do it because they feel it and not because they want money or anything. That's why I look up to them. ■ **Interviewed by Kristen Crockett, 16 and Mark Jennings, 16**



Willy, 18 *Chicago, IL*

Willy was a typical-looking African-American teen—for once, what I expected an interviewee to look like, with his hat backwards, jeans and a T-shirt. ■ I really admired his attitude towards education. He didn't just say how important it was, but he seemed to really understand what education can do for a person. Willy doesn't just find his education in the classroom. He learned from his experiences, from his mistakes and even jail. ■ He doesn't necessarily like school, but he is committed to going. ■ Amy Weisenbach

I live out south, a block from the hospital. It's fine, got a lot of friends out there, nice neighborhood.

My hobbies are playing basketball. I like going fishing and hunting.

I have several jobs. I once sold dope, but I got caught. I got caught three times, so that should tell you something. That told me something. I got arrested when I was selling drugs. They sent me for six months, and that was right before summer was coming last year.

This system is messed up. See, you get to the penitentiary, the juvenile detention center, it's rough in there. You gotta look out for your own. You make no friends in there, unless you know somebody already. Everybody out to get their own, and they'll do anything to get what they want. It's not a place I recommend for anybody.

I say, if you wake up in the morning, God already blessed you to wake up or he could've killed you in your sleep right there.

Spending time in jail will make you change your whole perspective on life. And you sure get knowledge too, great knowledge.

The most important thing in this world is knowledge.

First you need to go to school for that. It used to be, like, you only needed your diploma from high school. Now you got to go to college if you're gonna get a decent-paying job. Burger King after a while, you can't survive off of that, when you get of age and have a family. Nowadays, you gotta find something where you gotta sit in front of a computer or something. You gotta go to school for that. You gotta go to college. It's very important.

Well, school, it ain't something I look forward to, but I know I gotta do it. I just say, every day I can't wake up, "I gotta wake up." It ain't nothing like you get up jumping for joy. ■ **Interviewed by Michelle Huser, 13 and Amy Weisenbach, 17**

Freddie, 13 *Baltimore, MD*

Freddie's neighborhood is kind of crummy. No one wears shoes. They walk around with no shirts on. But Freddie had on purple shorts and a black T-shirt with red writing, a red Cardinals hat and some black Jordans. He had on white socks, and they were just sticking out of the shoe. One of the things he kept saying over and over again was that he wanted things to be clean. He wants everything to be clean—because nothing has ever been clean. ■ Courtney Snowden

In my old school, they had a list, and it was all troublemakers. My name, of course, was on that list, and every little thing that was wrong with me got sent to the office. If they do one little thing wrong, then they will get suspended. After, like, a couple of times you get suspended, they will kick you out. And that is what happened. I got expelled.

It is different from many schools, I think, that I have been to. The school that I just got out of, it was dirty. Graffiti all over the walls in the bathrooms. You wouldn't want to go there. There wasn't many fights in school, when I came there, there wasn't. People picked on people a lot, but nothing really happened.

I was just talking out in class and the teacher just told me to go to the office and they suspended me. First couple of times, like the first two times, it will be for three days. But now, ever since I got the order, it is for a week. I will get the order on Wednesday, and I have to come back the next Wednesday.

When I went home, my parents will say, "Show me the letter," because when I got suspended in school, they will call my mom's work and let her know that I am on my way home. And she will just say, "What is it for this time?" And if it was something serious, like fighting or something like that, then my mom would punish me. But if it was, like, just talking out in class or hollerin' at somebody or something—and one time, I didn't have a pen for the class on me—so my mom didn't punish me for that.

See, I hung with the wrong crowd, doing the things that the crowd did, and I turned bad.

I am trying to change. I just want to get my life straight and go to school and just go right on through it, so I wouldn't have to worry about it anymore in my life.

People burn people. They get mad and they just go off and shoot somebody. But I just don't go out. If a gun goes off, I don't want to be caught in the middle of it. But you can hear it through the house, though. Midnight, about 12 o'clock, all that happens. When you close your eyes you get a picture in your mind, and you just actually imagine seeing the bullet hitting the person.

There is a lot of people right now trying to keep the drugs off, and every time they see somebody with drugs on them, they will call the police and so-and-so will get arrested.

Sometimes, the police will be right there, and sometimes they will take a while, and sometimes they don't care about the drugs, because they just don't. You see, the cops around here, most of them, they are lazy. They just don't feel like filling out a police report. That is how they are.

Some people listen to the police. If you are out after 10 o'clock and if you are under 16, and they tell you to go in, and if you don't go in, then they will arrest you and stuff like that.

Most of the people do listen to the police, though. But the people who think they are all big and bad, they will just get in a fight with the cops and all this, and they will get theirself arrested.

I want to be a cop when I grow up, because I like doing things cops do, like busting people and shooting guns and stuff like that. I want to be a cop so I could help the neighborhood. I just like the things that cops did when I was a little kid and all the stuff they had to wear around their belt and all that.

But I plan on being a carpenter, now, because I like to put things together and build, and do a lot of things with wood.

You can easily just walk away from the violence and the drugs. That is what I do. I keep myself away from it.

I got two charges on me already that I got to go to court for—assault and robberies (I didn't do, because I was with my parents that night), and abduction and rape (that I didn't do, because I was with my parents that night). We got a whole bunch of witnesses for us stating I was with my parents that night, or I was so-and-so that night. I was grounded that night, or something. I can't get in no trouble, so that is why I walked away.

I just want to keep my act straight and just stay in school, so when the time comes to graduate, I will be out of school.

I am back in school now. When I got kicked out of school, and I went to another school, I didn't have many friends. But now, since I am going up to high school now, and all my friends around the neighborhood is going to be going there, too, I will feel comfortable. I just don't want to make the wrong mistake.

I can easily just walk away from the crowd, and this time I don't need them. They don't need to be my friends if they are going to keep on getting into trouble.

If there is hope, the drugs should be off the streets. The streets, around my neighborhood, they just need to be cleaned. I mean, most of them around my neighborhood, there is trash cans, but people just don't feel like going to the trash can and they are just throwing away their stuff, they will just throw it right there on the street or in the gutter or something.

Nobody likes to be dirty, and I don't like to be dirty. It is just an important thing to me. When I grow up and get married and if I have any kids, I want them to, you know, see the streets today, how they are right now, but when my kids grow up, I want them to have a nice life where it will be clean, no drugs, no violence, or anything.

When I get a family, I want to move into a real nice big house by the water, and hopefully, the neighborhood will be clean with no drugs or anything. — **Interviewed by Wendy Petesnik, 20 and Courtney Snowden, 14**

Armon

Armon, 18

Because Armon was a recipient of a Horatio Alger scholarship, Oprah Winfrey had featured him on her show. ■ He struggles with peer pressure but has supportive family members to encourage him to finish school and stay out of trouble. Religion also plays an important role in his life. ■ I listened keenly to his message and how hopeful he was, wishing I could take some of his strength with me. ■ Randy McDade

I just graduated from high school in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I live in one of the better neighborhoods. There is not a lot of fast life. Drug selling and anything like that, any negative things you see on TV, is just not evident in my neighborhood.

I don't live the "Leave it to Beaver" life. I don't live in a nice, nice neighborhood, but my neighborhood is OK. It's surrounded by a lot of factories and local businesses, so it slows down the pace of everyone, because everyone lives in the area. It's not bad at all. It's not drive-by shootings, nothing like that. I live in a nice environment.

I drive through the rough sides of Grand Rapids on the way to church, and a lot of my high school friends live there. It's not really bad. It's just that people loiter, and the streets may not be as clean as some other streets. They're not really bad neighborhoods, it's just that they're not kept up.

But every neighborhood in my city has its problems, whether it's drugs, racism or whatever. So I'm not going to say that everything is bad here and everything is good there. It's a mixture. Everything has its positives and negatives.

I wouldn't wish to move. I have to live with the situation in Grand Rapids. Everything happens for a reason. Where I live is part of my life, and if I changed location I'd be changing my life, which means I probably wouldn't be the same person I am right now.

I live with my mother. My childhood consisted of being in a single-parent home—having a father who lived in the same city, but always had more time for his business than for his son. I have to do things a little bit better than those coming from the two-parent homes, simply because the finances aren't always there.

I have to find other ways of doing things when it comes to going to college. I'm the one that has to go out and hunt for scholarships. I'm the one that has to go out and look for my father to kick in something, knowing that he doesn't want to, and really don't care to ask him for something because of all these years of not being around.

My childhood consisted of going to school and being one of the few blacks in the class, being a minority. Now, when I mean minority, I don't mean less of a person. I just mean minority in number, as far as ethnic background.

My childhood consisted of a lot of things. Being around friends who chose to go separate ways. Friends who chose to use drugs and to smoke weed and drink on a continuous basis, and to neglect school, and eventually to drop out of school.

Being in an environment where kids ridiculed me. They called me nerd. They called me sell out, oreo. It was hard. Thinking back, it was really hard for me.

My mother, she's my mentor, as far as steering me in the right direction, giving me guidance, and pushing me to do my best in whatever I choose to do.

My brother doesn't live with us. My brother is 24 years old. He has played a major role in my success. He's always been the one that I look up to. He taught me how to throw a football, and now I'm very athletic. He taught me how to play basketball. He taught me lots of things.

His choices as far as success in high school, as far as success in grades and honors, he didn't get that. That was a let down for me, but it just helped me to say, "Well, Armon, you're not going to do that. You're going to do the opposite. Anything that he's messed up on, you're going to make it good."

His mistakes, his trials, made me a stronger person, because I had to deal with them as a brother. And ridicule towards him also hurt me. You know, someone else, one of his peers was saying, "Well, he's not doing anything," then I had to live with it just as much as he did.

So it helped me to be stronger, and it helped me to go forward. And I didn't look down on him at all. I give him the opportunity to live through my success, and we are real close. He's still my brother, I love him. That's how it is.

All the hard work that I did, all the things that I did in spite of receiving ridicule from peers, it paid off. That's the bottom line. And those are the things I'd tell a child. Keep doing it. If somebody's putting you down, don't worry about it. It's hard to see at

that time. The race isn't given to the swift, but it's given to the one who endures to the end.

And that's how my life has been. It's been a life of endurance, of maintaining focus. Sure I got some scrapes and bruises along the way, but I had to keep going.

No one has the perfect life, but my life is fine. I'm content. ■ **Interviewed by Randy McDade, 18**

Rita, 16 *(without a c.)*

I thought I knew what kinds of lives kids had living on the streets, what they had to go through, but what came out of this interview was harder and tougher than I ever imagined. ■ Rita is a lot more optimistic than I thought she'd be. She actually has plans for the future. She plans to join the Job Corps. Five years from now she wants to be living in an apartment with her own kids. ■ I could have talked to Rita for hours, about everything. ■ Lisa Sohn

Well, my name is Rita. I'm only 16 years old.

All I do is, like, hang with my friends, hang around, you know, try to get my shit—my stuff—together, you know. Mostly what I do is just hang around. I prostitute sometimes, but I really sell drugs.

I was doing real good at home, but my stepfather used to, like, come home drunk. I used to be molested and abused up. He used to beat up on my family so we couldn't do nothing about it. I'm not ready to go back home, 'cause my stepfather's around, you know, 'cause I was scared of getting molested again, you know. I, like, go and visit them but I don't like when he's around.

My father is in the pen. He been there for ten years. He ain't coming out until five more years. I feel bad, because I really never, like, met my father, so I really don't know him. You know, I miss him a lot. I wish he was right here with me. He writes me, so, you know, he's mad about what's going on with me right now, me out here selling myself, prostituting and stuff like that.

It's nothing wrong in the house as much as that my stepfather used to always come home drunk, and always molesting. But one thing that's real good is that our family used to always be happy, go out, you know, go shopping and everything, but it messed it up when my stepfather came back drunk and everything.

My mom is trying to leave him, divorce him, you know, so I could come back home.

I've got five brothers. Two of my brothers died in the gang in L.A. I got a little sister. I'm scared she's going to go through the same stuff I went through. My family is stressed out because we're losing our family apart, and stuff.

I've been prostituting for almost three years. It's not easy, but it's scary, because you think you could get killed like that or kidnapped, and stuff like that. The first time I did it, I was very scared because I didn't know what did I have to do, you know? I was scared to get in cars and ask anyone if they were police and stuff like that. It was scary.

Girls and guys do the same. Eleven years old to 18. I got a little 11-year-old friend out there. He's a punk, you know. He take care of himself. I say, "What you do?" I tell him, "You're 11 years old. Why don't you just go back home? Ain't nothing out here on the streets for you. You're 11 years old. You know, you could get kidnapped, raped." But he's, like, he want to be in the streets. He's stuck with the drugs. His family was doing drugs when their mom was pregnant so he's stuck with the drugs. That's why.

Right now, I stay on the streets, but it's hard because what I'm doing right now. I stay in the house with my boyfriend and my cousins. I would stay on the streets, but I mean not in the streets. I used to, like, always sell myself so I could rent a hotel room and stuff like that.

I won't sleep with a lot of guys, you know. I use protection but I'm still with one guy, but I never use, you know, without a condom or nothing. I'm going to get tested for AIDS. Right now, like, I'm pregnant. You know, it's hard right about now.

School, it's hard to go to school because, I mean, I'm in a safe place and everything but I'm not, you know, stable.

I'm in tenth grade. I'm not going to go back to school but I'm going to Job Corps. I would like to learn computer. I need to graduate from high school and get my diploma and stuff like that. Five years from now I hope I be living in an apartment or a house with my own kids and, you know, be married.

I'd rather go back home, really. But my stepfather's still alcoholic and I don't want to go through that stuff again. ■ **Interviewed by Lisa Sohn, 18**

Carl, 15/Gary, 16/Aaron, 16

These young men joked around a lot. Characteristic of some teenage boys, they often interrupted the roundtable to get up and playfully share some punches. The trio could be mentioned in *Webster's Dictionary* under the word "friends." Theirs is an interracial friendship. ■ Chanda Boyden and Rebecca Oberg

CARL: Gary lives in the same townhouse as I do.

GARY: Only one street down.

CARL: Eighth grade, Aaron was the class clown.

AARON: I'm still the class clown. I don't care. I still make good grades. Some people say I need to be a comedian. I like to see people laugh all the time. It makes school fun and not boring.

CARL: I agree.

GARY: There's always a class clown in any grade.

AARON: But I'm the best.

CARL: I got teased, because if there was girls in the room or something and there wasn't no chairs left, I used to get up and let them sit down. And I used to get teased about that and I didn't have no friends. And then Aaron came along, and we started hanging around, and then I got a lot more friends. In eighth grade, it was always me and Aaron getting in trouble.

AARON: I get picked on all the time because I hang around with Carl, and they say, "He's this, he's that, he's that." But I don't really care because I know he's my friend, I can't do a friend like that.

GARY: I dropped out the middle of the second semester the last school year. Family problems, basically. My mother accepted it pretty much, but my father didn't quite like it. But my father has no say-so in the matter, because I don't live with him. I'm gonna be going back this year. Friends like Carl and Aaron convinced me to go back in.

CARL: I told him he's stupid if he's gonna be stupid like that. Dropping out of school is so dumb. I would never ever drop out. It ain't the right thing to do. The only advantage about dropping out of school would be you ain't gotta wake up in the morning. But it's not a good thought.

AARON: Me and Carl took Gary for a little walk on the street. We showed him the places that he didn't really want to see, said, "That's how you're gonna be."

CARL: This old bum laying on a bench.

AARON: Long haired, nasty.

CARL: I think people drop out of school because they don't feel like putting up with stuff anymore.

AARON: Pretty much people drop out of school because of family problems. Then you go to school and people will joke about it and stuff. Just all the pressure around you. ■ **Interviewed by Chanda Boyden, 16 and Rebecca Oberg, 14**

Jim

Jim, 17 Dallas, TX

Jim is a friendly, intelligent, skinny, innocent child. He was physically and mentally abused by his parents and was deprived of food for days at a time. Jim is not an evil person. I believe that his obsession with fire is a consequence of his abuse. I don't believe his intention is ever to cause pain to anyone. He is crying out for help. ■ Jim deserves a chance to be loved and to succeed. He has had no one to turn to his whole life. His trust has been torn by the actions of his parents. If you can't trust your parents, who can you trust? Maybe now, he can turn his life around, while sorting through his past. ■ Kristen Crockett

My parents, they always fight with me, so I had to leave. Physical abuse, neglect, mental abuse—I want to get emancipated and all that, but they aren't too much for that, so I may have to take it to court.

They say that I've got an attitude. I don't have an attitude. Like, they used to hit me and stuff. They'll threaten me. They have to lie to me to get the upper hand. They tell me about how they'll have me locked up in Juvenile when I'm 18 and stuff. And I was like, "Go ahead and call them! I don't care." But that was a lie, because when you turn 17, they can't put you in Juvenile. So, I called my dad's bluff, so he got mad and started hitting me with his fists. At first he hit me in the belly—that didn't hurt. Then he started grabbing me on my neck and stuff. That kinda hurt. And he grabbed me around the neck and picked me up, started swinging around. He didn't want me to start getting big and stuff, because he knew I'd start fighting back. But he's a lot bigger than I am. I was mad. You really don't feel it when you're mad. I mean you can see things, a blur.

I wasn't no bad kid. Nothing like that. I guess they take out their problems on me, seeing that I was little and they could. I've always been me, and there's a lot of stuff that I just won't put up with.

I never had a broken bone or anything. I had a messed up back and an arm with bruises on it and stuff, but I never had anything broken.

I'm not a violent person. I can't hit back. It's wrong. If we didn't have places like these, I probably would have gone homicidal—you can only take so much.

Food was more of a privilege than a right. I think they feed people more in jail. I'd eat something and then I'd go back to get something and they'd tell me, "You had enough!" They made me feel bad about eating at their place and all. I used to try and get jobs, but they'd stop me—they wanted me to be dependent on them. So when I go and get food, they'd be like, "You've had enough, you live in this house and eat our food."

I have funny eating patterns sometimes. My mom will cook a meal early in the morning, and I'd be like, "Damn, we just ate breakfast," so I'd be willing to wait 'til later on to eat. But when later on come, I'd go to eat and it would be gone. Most of the days you just get what you get, so I'd fix some biscuits, eat some cookies, something like that, just something. Sometimes you kinda give up. So there'd be days when I wouldn't eat, because I'd be worn down from trying to run and get food.

They used to always belittle me. They would always talk about me, they always found something wrong. To make sure I wasn't crazy, I had a little test. I'd go into my room, I wouldn't eat nothing, I'd just sit in my room for weeks at a time. I didn't feel like being bothered with his mouth or nothing. I'd just close the door, listen to the radio, look at the TV. They found something wrong, they'd take the door off it's hinges and say things like, "You don't do nothing but sit around the house, you come back to your room and act like you don't know nobody," and stuff like that. That's not new, they didn't give a damn. They just had to blame something on me.

I haven't been in school for a long time. I want to go back. I like school. I'm supposed to be in twelfth. I'm in the tenth, though. I used to skip school a lot. I like school, don't get me wrong. I skipped school because I couldn't put up with the teachers. They'd be bitching and stuff. And then I'd have to go home and put up with the same stuff. I needed time to relax and stuff.

I'm not flunking school, I just don't feel like doing the work. It was really about doing the assignments. But when I turned in assignments, they'd be 90s and 80s.

My parents tried to use school as an excuse and shit. They would say, "Your grades are slipping." So they'd take the TV and the radio and my grades would be the same with or without the TV.

I can't hate nobody, I mean that's just me. But when you say "love," what do you mean? I don't love 'em, I don't hate 'em. To me, I think God will take care of them, so I don't too much worry about it.

I used to cry, because you feel helpless and all. I'd cry when I couldn't do nothing. I used to do terrible stuff—you know, when you get angry and all.

I used to try to make bombs with a light bulb—take a light bulb and put gasoline in it. Or you can wait 'til it gets real hot and drop some water on it, and it just pops. That would relax me, because you would hear "boom" and then you'd calm down. That would feel real good.

I like to burn alcohol, take rubbing alcohol and pour it out—the light will just flare up.

Fire is deep. I used to set fires a lot. I like to play with fire. I'm not an arsonist or nothing. I don't set people's houses on fire, or shit like that. I just wanted to see what would happen.

I was in ninth grade, and I was just walking the halls, and this boy had gave me a cigarette lighter. I don't know what told me to do it, but I had opened this locker up and he had paper, nothing but paper. So I said, "Aw, what the hell." And so, I had lit up some newspaper and it were burning, so I had closed it. And I just walked off, but something told me, "Go put the fire out." And I turned around and I seen him coming. I don't know how he opened it up—fshoooo! And I was like, "Damn!" He started screaming. I ran back to class, though.

I went to this school downtown and I was fed up, 'cause they wouldn't let me do nothing. It wasn't what I was expecting in a high school. So we went to the bathroom, and we had a lighter. There was a trash can full of dry toilet paper. You know how it burns real good? We had took the toilet paper and lit it and I was just joking, you know, "Throw it out, throw it out." So I put it in the trash can and we had walked out. But I'd forgot the trash can was full of paper. So we had walked out and I said, "What if...?" So I turned around and walked back, and there was this big flame in the bathroom, and I closed it and ran back to the lunchroom. This happened at about 12:00 and later on, it must have been about 4:00, they came over the announcement talking about, "We have a sick person in school..." and stuff. I transferred. It was the end of the semester, so I went ahead and put my little transfer in. I wasn't trying to hurt nobody or nothing.

There's a lot of things I'd like to do, but a lot of things I'd like to do you have to have money to do it. Like explosives; explosives cost money, though. Like nitroglycerin...plastic. That stuff costs money. I like aviation a lot; I would like to fly planes.

I wouldn't go to the Air Force. See, I'm not violent; I don't want to blow up cities. Explosives are different! I'd just blow up stuff—not blow up people. I want to be an entrepreneur, do my own thing. I don't want to be, "Yes, sir!" and taking orders from people that could lead to harming other people.

I really enjoy writing. Anything. Thoughts. I'll be looking at TV and see a show and start writing about it. And I like music. In my world, it would just be me, my music and my stories.

There's a lot of stuff you don't have to put up with, 'cause there's a world out there that has a few itty bitty good things about it—a lot of bad things in it, but good things, too.

I wish I had my emancipation and all. I wish I had a chance, you know? All I need is a chance. I hope everything works out, you know? ■ **Interviewed by Kristen Crockett, 16 and Courtney Snowden, 14**

Rae, 15 *Zuni, NM*

As we left Albuquerque, we figured we were in for a long, somewhat uneventful trip. We weren't prepared for the nearly four-hour trek across the most spectacular, yet desolate, land we have ever seen. Before we got to the Zuni town, the only sign of civilization we saw was a small trailer park. ■ Upon first seeing Rae, we saw pleasant disposition written all over her face. She has long, wavy black and brown hair. Her eyes are almond-shaped and brown. ■ Being Miss Zuni didn't seem to have any effect on her ego. Since we left the reservation, we have been exchanging letters and continue to learn about her life and dreams. ■ **Christina Snorten and Ben Young**

My name is Rae. I'm a Zuni. I live with both my parents, and my grandmother, and I have a little brother. It's fun living with them.

I like living here, on the reservation, but I would like to go someplace else and see how it's like to live in another city. I like living at home, because it's quiet where I live. I like our culture. It's real different from the others, and the religion you have is something special.

My goals and dreams are first to graduate from high school, then to go to college. I would like to become a pediatrician, and with the help and support from my family, I know I can do what I want to and achieve my goals.

My role model is probably my grandma, because she taught me a lot about Zuni culture and what was done a long time ago. She listens and hears my problems. She helps me talk it out, and asks me not to do stuff that I'm not supposed to. We have a good relationship. My other role model is probably my mom, because she is always there for me. ■ **Interviewed by Eric Augenstein, 15; Christina Snorten, 12; and Ben Young, 12**

Cheryl, 16 *Logansport, IN*

We interviewed Cheryl at a northern Indiana high school. She was in a summer program for drop outs and potential drop outs. ■ Cheryl is 16, skinny, red-headed, and a little above average height. She looked like any typical teenager, with a pink T-shirt and jeans shorts. Our first impression of her was of a quiet, ordinary girl, but Cheryl's life is far from ordinary. Regular beatings have become a part of life, and she accepts it as a daily routine, like getting dressed. ■ **Lisa Schubert and Ben Young**

Around my house, most of the time, it's pretty busy. We have our fights, we have arguments, and most of the time we get along. I mean, seven people living in a trailer, that's really hard, with only three bedrooms. So you've got to learn to get along, or go outside and find something to do. And I work around the house, because a lot of people living in one trailer, you got to always keep it clean, because if you don't, you let things pile up and it gets really bad.

I got two brothers and one sister, my little girl—she's three months—and my boyfriend, and my mom and my dad. It's just, people in and out all the time. You really can't go to sleep unless everybody else is asleep.

Out in the country there's a lot of things to do, if you set your mind to it. We play basketball, soccer, just about everything. We just, you know, walk around outside, or we can walk in the fields. One of our best hobbies are looking for arrowheads. We got a collection, about a thousand-some dollars. We got a whole bunch of them.

I wouldn't say we're special. We're kind of an odd family, because we try to get along, but with the brothers I got, it's really hard. They're always trying to start arguments and trying to fight with us. We're telling each other to get out, you know, and nobody wants to leave. So it's kind of hard.

My brothers are crazy. My older brother, he's, like, 20, he'll be 21. He don't want to work. He just wants to live with our parents. He thinks if he doesn't work, he's just going to have a life with my parents.

So, it's really like a madhouse. Sometimes, you're real happy during the day when you have a good day. It's just, like, you

never felt that way before, you're just real happy about it. But if you have a fight that day, it's like a couple of days go by, and then it clears up. Sometimes it can take a week if you've had a big fight.

My brothers like to get into it, saying stuff about me, that I should be working. They say it when my boyfriend's not around, because they know if they say it when he is around, he's going to end up hurting them. So they don't say it around him.

It's just, I don't know ... with a kid, it's kind of hard. At first, I thought it would be really easy. I thought, "This is going to be nothing." But when the baby gets there, everything changes. Everything is totally different.

My parents love her. When I'm out, my mom's home taking care of her, and so is my dad. I mean, I can go do anything I want, and they're going to be there for her. And see, that makes me feel bad, because she's my daughter. I had her and I need to raise her. So that hurts me, and she gets so attached to my mom and dad. She's thinking that they're the parents. Having a kid, that's kind of hard, to feel like you're not even the parent.

When I'm home, I want to be with my little girl all the time. I was 15 when I had my baby. My parents wanted me to get an abortion. My mom said she could have made me get it, but they would have had to kill me first, because I don't believe in that. I wouldn't be able to live with it. It's just really stupid and it's sick. As soon as I get old enough to protest, I'm going to go to the White House and see the President.

My parents hate it that I dropped out of school. There's nothing they can do about it. They always told me they were going to put me in a home or something.

A lot of people told me not to drop out. But see, I didn't listen to that. A lot of kids won't listen to grownups, and they'll do what they want. That's just the way I was; I was going to do what I wanted.

My boyfriend, he don't like me going to school, because he don't like me to be with another guy, or even looking at them. He's really strict. He won't let me work, because he thinks that I'm going to be hitting on other guys, and he don't want me with other guys. He wants me to stay home.

He doesn't want me to have anybody else except for him. He thinks he's great and wonderful. He thinks he's the one and only for me. I got to always watch what I say around him. He can talk and he can see other girls and go out with other girls, but if I do it, then he'll kill them. If I even talk to a guy, it makes him so upset, he ends up hurting me, and sometimes he hurts the guy.

I wish I would have never met him, because now I'm so wrapped up in it. We fight a lot. The cops have seen it and told me, "Have him put in jail." But I don't want to do that, because I love him so much. I take it.

I got to be real careful what I do and how I react. I hate it, but there's nothing I can do about it. I won't ever leave him. I mean, I'll always love him, no matter what. I don't care how bad he beats me up, I'll always go back to him.

Sometimes I fight back, and he's been hurt a couple of times. I've almost killed him, but it's just nothing. You get used to it. It's just because of the way he is.

I don't love him for the bad part of him, I love him for the good part of him. He can be real nice when he wants to. I kind of look more towards the good side, you know. If it's going to be a good day, then he's going to treat me OK. He usually has bad days. I live day by day. I don't really try to look into the future much.

He stole stuff. He stole a lot of things that would have been worth a lot of money. He's just been in prison for lots. He's so used to it, it's nothing to him anymore. He's tried to straighten out.

I thought everything was going to be great. He was going to pay attention to me. He was going to just be a real nice father to her and everything, and my parents were going to accept her, which they did. But the father can't have nothing to do with her. He says he loves her and everything, but he's always saying, "Is it someone else's kid?" He doesn't think it's his. We're going to get blood tests done and everything to prove it is.

I'm really scared about getting married. I really am, but I'll probably go ahead and do it anyway, just to see how it turns out. I told him one time, "I'm not going to marry you, I changed my mind," and he was hurting me real bad. He's the one that asked me. I thought, "Well I'll go ahead. I'll be with him. If it's going to happen it's going to happen." I was really happy about it, but he's just getting so rough anymore.

He's not letting me do anything without him. When I get older, he won't even let me work. I mean when I'm 20, in my 30s, he's not going to let me work. He said there's no way.

There is nothing I can do. Just as long as he works and brings the money home, that's fine. I probably won't get to buy what I want, 'cause when he gets his check, he'll spend his money on what he wants, on him and everything. And he doesn't give any of it to me, it's just his.

In ways, I do regret having a baby, because, I mean, I don't want her to ever die, and one of these days, she's going to die. I don't want her to ever die.

I try to give her everything, but it's hard. For one thing, we don't really have the money to raise her, but she gets practically everything she wants. But still, you want to give her more, and it's kind of hard if you're not working, too.

The best thing for her is just to love her. That's everything a kid needs. But what more would I give her? I'd try to give her a lot more things to make her happy, a lot more toys and everything. Everything I saw, I want to buy her, but I don't have the money. Kind of makes you feel bad, because she knows you're her mother. You should have a job, you know? And it hurts because you can't do that.

My parents are going to be moving out in a couple of weeks, and so is everybody else, except me and my boyfriend and my daughter. They are supposed to be moving to Florida. I'm scared. I don't want to live that way. But until I can try to get my own place and get a good job and take care of her myself, it's not going to be without him being around... because he said he'll look me up anywhere I go.

I'd probably wait until he was gone the whole day. My mom would come back here when he wasn't home, so he wouldn't know I was leaving, and then leave with them. I'd be gone before he got back, because, I mean, he goes 130 down highways with me in the car, and he scares me to death. I mean, how easy that car could flip. He's always trying to scare me, wanting me to be scared of him... which I am.

One day I was so afraid to get in the car with him, and he made me get in the car with him, and I couldn't get out, 'cause he had a hold of my arm. Most of the time he's drunk when he does that, but he was just really angry. He has a temper, and if he don't get his way, he'll let you know about it. It's scary.

In a way, I have fears of dying myself, about him practically killing me one of these days. It's just the fear that I'll probably always be with him.

He said, if I ever left, he would kill me. So I got to be really careful what I do and what I say. I don't think other women should put up with it. I do, because it's happening to me. ■ **Interviewed by Lisa Schubert, 13 and Ben Young, 12**

Blanca, 18 *Tampa, FL*

As Blanca was growing up, her parents used to work in the fields as migrant workers. I was surprised when she told me that she made it through school. She's got college to go to now. She has good confidence in herself, and she's a very smart girl. She's beautiful. I wish her the best of luck in the world, 'cause she's got a lot going for her. She'll make it out there. ■ Rolando Liriano

I just graduated from high school this past June, and I'm planning on continuing my education at the University of Florida. I start in a couple of weeks, in August. I'm planning on going into physical therapy, and if I don't go into physical therapy, I might decide to go into the medical field. I'm not totally decided on it. I'm more leaning towards physical therapy.

And I'm really excited about it. I look forward to meeting a lot of new people and doing a lot of new things. But I'm also a little sad that I'll have to leave a lot of my friends and family down here, because I've lived down here so long that I have a lot of ties. As a child, I spent most of my life down here in Florida, pretty much in the same area.

I live with my uncles and my grandmother. My parents used to do migrant work and they would go out of state, at least once a year.

I consider myself very lucky, because after I started school we stopped migrating and I stayed in the same area. That helped me a lot because it helped me, school-wise. I think it just eliminated a lot of problems, because when you're a migrant worker, you have to move maybe two, three times a year. And you really can't keep everything together.

The biggest problem with that is if you're my age, school age, you go from one school and then it's time for your parents to go look for work somewhere else, and you have to leave. You leave your friends, and you have to go at another school. You have to start all over again each time you move, and that holds you back in school a lot.

I've always been interested in school, and I've always done well. I think that if I would've had to migrate—some people still do it even through high school—that it would have held me back a lot.

I had an interest in pursuing my education, and a lot of the times, my family would be really lenient towards that. Such as if I was doing homework or something, and if there were chores to do around the house that I could lend a hand in, they would be very lenient with that, and let it stay awhile the way things were until I finished what I had to do in school.

I've never had to go out and work the fields. I did try it a couple of times, not because I had to, just to earn a little bit of extra money. It's like, when I first hit 16, I thought maybe that would be the easier job. You know, you wouldn't have to go through a lot of interviews. I went for a half a day, and I discovered just how hard it was. It was back-breaking. It's long hours, low pay. It was minimum wage. I know that labor like that never pays high, but I learned that it was really hard work and long hours.

And I'm glad I got that experience, because it gave me extra motivation for me to educate myself. I realized that if I didn't get some kind of education, then I may end up having to do that type of work. I didn't think I could handle something like that, you know. I'm proud of my family, because they learned how to cope with it. Otherwise, there would be no other way to make a living.

■ Interviewed by Rolando Liriano, 17 and Eric Zamora, 18

Mother-Daughter

Father-Son

After I had my son, it was like, "You have somebody now to set an example for." It hasn't set me back. It has made me strive more, because when I was 13, in ninth grade, I had failed that year, and I wasn't even pregnant then. Now, you have to show your child that you can do it.

Natalia, 16 *Hyattsville, MD*

One of the best things that ever happened to me is I've been kept away from all this —the fact that God gave me the strictest parents in the world. There was not one time I remember growing up playing with little boys, little girls. They kept me away. They didn't want me to ever get involved in the streets.

Raphael, 17 *Bridgeport, CT*

The kids I interviewed haunt me all the time.
I want to know what is going to happen to them.

Courtney Snowden, 14 *Children's Express, Washington, DC*

Charlie, 17 *Oakleaf, CA*

The thing that struck me about Charlie was that she really had her life together—not what I was expecting from a 17-year-old mother with a 12-month-old son. She knows where she wants to go with her life, and what she wants for her son. She has an optimistic view of the future: she knows what she has to do to achieve her goals, and she knows that it's going to be hard. I had the feeling she was going to be one of the ones who make it. She said she believes anybody can do anything they put their mind to, and that's how she's living her life. — Lisa Sohn

I have a son that's 12 months. I'm not married. I was supposed to get married, but it just seems like it didn't work out. I'd been with him for about four years, but we had already started having problems. I have goals and he's not helping me achieve my goals. So I told him I don't want to be in any relationship with him anymore and that, you know, he could still come and take care of his child and see his child, which he's not doing anyway.

He has taken responsibility for the whole 12 months up until now. And to me, it seems like he was only doing what he was doing because of me, when he should have been doing it because that's his child and he loves him. If I want some diapers, I have to go over there and say, "Willis needs some diapers," and I shouldn't have to do that. He should just be going to the store and say, "Oh, my son needs some diapers." Or even if he doesn't, "I'll buy him an extra pack of diapers." But it doesn't go that way.

When you're having a relationship and then you have a baby, a baby really changes that relationship a lot. If you really don't have a strong relationship, you won't be able to make it. So it was kind of fun having him around—him going to prenatal visits with me and him being there when I birthed him and everything, when I went into labor. I mean, he was there for everything as far as that's concerned. It was nice.

Before I got pregnant, I felt that, yes, I could bring a child into this world. But after he got here, I felt that, you know, this is something I should have really thought about what I was doing, because I brought a child in this life who I have to care for and who have to depend on me for everything. Because the mother gets pretty much the responsibility, whereas the man, he can just wipe his feet, brush the dust off his feet and carry on.

Before you get pregnant, your mind is so clear, but the minute you find out, so many things are going through your head that you just get so confused. You can't believe it at first and then it's like, "What am I going to do? How am I going to take care of this child?" You know, this child is going to be with me for the rest of my life or his life. I mean it's a big step, becoming a parent. It's a big step. It's a change. It really and truly is a change.

I feel, especially having a boy, you need a father figure around for the child, you know, even if it's not their father—somebody just to look up to, somebody to confide in. Men feel that they can only talk to a man. I know I'm going to do my best and I feel that my best is all I can give to him. And hopefully, it'll be good enough for him.

Until I get married, I'm not going to have any more kids.

My pregnancy was planned, because we didn't use protection, but I didn't sit right down and plan it. I think any pregnancy that you do not use any type of birth control for is planned, because you can get a disease or you can get pregnant. You know the things that can happen. Of course, some girls are young, but we all know where babies come from.

I would have waited longer to have my son. That would have been it, because I feel that I can't give him all that he deserves right now. Hopefully, by the time he gets old enough to realize what's going on, I'll be settled, but I feel that I might give him the best that he could have, to make him the man that I want him to become.

The one thing about having kids out of wedlock is it will never be the same. Like, if I get married and have kids, even though that is my son and my husband will love my son, it's not the same as those kids that are his. It will never be that way because this is somebody else's. I want all my kids by the same person. That didn't happen.

Stop. Back up and go in the other direction, because you really don't know what you're getting yourself into. It's not as easy as it seems. Your whole teen age life... you will not have one. I didn't understand what they meant until it happened. Your days will be spent at home with your child—you and your child—because you cannot find a babysitter. Not only that, you need to spend time

with your child, because you need to start developing that parent-child relationship while they're young. Even when that child turns 18, that child is still your baby. That child is still going to come to you, you know, when it's down or it needs something. At least wait until you're out of high school, so you can enjoy yourself.

When you have a child, you change. I can't just think of myself. I can't say, "Well, I'm going to stay out all night and I'm going to go party, and I'm going to go to school tomorrow." My son is going to be growing up in about 13 or 14 years. I should set a good enough example where I can say, "See, I went to school even though I had you, even though I was working," or whatever, "I went to school anyway."

I want to go to school—preferably a black, four-year college—and I don't really know what I want to study, but I want to work with people. I know that much. And I always wanted to be a lawyer. That's something that I might achieve as time goes on, but right now my main goal is being able to take care of my family and attend school at the same time.

I have friends that have four and five kids and I don't know how they do it, 'cause I can barely do it with one. I know I'm not having any more kids for a long time.

What happens is they have their children, like, when they're just entering high school, and that's the worst time. For my first two years, I got to experience high school a lot. But, when you first come into high school, and you have a baby to take care of and everything, it discourages you. You really don't know what to do because there's so much stress. And a lot of people drop out. We have plenty of girls who drop out. I mean, it's easy to get discouraged when you're a parent, especially when you don't have anybody to back you up. Luckily, I have my mother, you know, but I understand where they're coming from.

To me, when you have kids, they put fight in you. They say I'm a teen parent, I'm not going to be able to make it. I'm not going to let anybody sit and tell me what I cannot do. Because I had a child, that doesn't mean anything. People make mistakes, you know. My mistake was having a child—not really a mistake—my downfall was having a child, and I mean it's something that we cannot change, so I have to row with the flow.

I'm not going to fall into poverty. I hope I don't. I should never say never, but I hope I never fall into poverty. I'm going to do everything that I can.

Some want to just get a check, watch their soap operas, and live happily ever after. But I don't want to do that. I didn't have a child to get a check from welfare. I work.

The stereotypes about teenage mothers, the majority of them, are not true. You know, they sit on welfare and they don't work and then they're high school dropouts, they don't go to college, etc., etc. It does happen, but what they do is they focus in on the bad. There's a judge at Oakland Municipal Court right now, and she had them young. But nobody focuses in on that.

Anybody can do anything they put their mind to. ■ **Interviewed by Lisa Sohn, 17 and Malik Thompson, 16**

Sandy, 14 *Camden, NJ*

Sandy was rather short and she was a little chunky. She had curly blonde hair and she wore glasses. She was a rather sweet person. We interviewed her at a shelter. ■ We were a little apprehensive about going in there because it didn't seem inviting, but once you walked in everybody was really friendly and pleasant. Sandy hated the place, but she said, " You know, it's a roof over my head." ■ She was always laughing. Through it all, she seemed pretty happy that she at least had some place to live. ■ Sarah Rosen

I like swimming. Riding a bike. My hobbies are anything that takes thinking.

I have twin sisters. Younger. They're slobs. They are.

I have parrots and hamsters. I had dogs but they had to be put to sleep because they were mean. Nobody else would take them.

My mom left us.

My dad worked for eight years and every week he'd sign his paycheck and give it to her and think that she was paying bills. And she wasn't—a $1000 electric bill, $300 phone bill, just bills, bills, bills. She didn't pay the mortgage for three years. And he made $600 a week. And our mortgage was only $350. She never paid it.

She left about a month-and-a-half, two months ago, just after we lost the house. She had a double life. She has her own apartment. She has a boyfriend. She has everything. I kind of thought I trusted her a little bit more not to do that.

It's hard, because I'm used to getting whatever I wanted. See, when my mom was around, she was like my best friend. She always had money, so I always got money. Now my dad doesn't like spending no money at all. It's a lot different than what it used to be. If I had my way I'd have my school clothes already, and I don't even have that. But I can understand my dad. It's hard. We don't have money.

About two months ago we lost our house to the taxes. I have no idea what that means. I just know we had to get out of the house. We've been in my brother's. We've been camping. We've been everywhere. But we've only been here in the shelter for two weeks.

Otherwise it was OK until I found out we were coming here. I had this big stereotype of one big big room like a gymnasium, with all these beds. It's not bad, it's just a little of a pain in the butt.

At first it felt like, you know, these people are going to be mean, and nobody wants to be around you. But, it's OK.

You're not allowed to do nothing here. I've got to be everywhere with my father. My father has to walk me to the bathroom. My father has to walk me to get a drink. I have to get up 7:00 in the morning. I really hate that. And then I have to go to bed. I have to be in this place by 8:00 every night. I'm not allowed to sleep out because they're paying for my bed and they give me a whole bunch of whatever.

I have lots of friends, it's just that I don't really keep in touch because I don't have any money to call.

It doesn't feel any different to not have a home than what it usually does. It feels like an apartment complex here. It just doesn't feel any different, you know.

We're leaving soon. We got an apartment. But as soon as we get to that apartment complex I'm not spending a day in that house. I can't stand being around the same three people all the time.

My childhood was rough. We went through, you know, different stages. We were put in a foster home when we were younger. Mom and Dad were homeless again. They didn't want to go to any of the parents for help. They wanted to be on their own. They wanted to be independent. It was rough. It was fun. It was all different.

I just laugh at everything, you know. It's just one of them things. You just got to always be happy. I love being happy.

▬ Interviewed by Lydia Isaac, 16 and Sarah Rosen, 16

Natalia, 16 *Hyattsville, MD*

Natalia is an African-American female. She is short and skinny and had an earring in her nose. If I had passed her on the street, I wouldn't have thought that such a small girl had a baby and had gone through all the things she's been through. ▬ She was staying at a maternity home which helps single mothers. It gives them and their babies a place to stay and helps them out while they go to school and work. ▬ It just appeared to me that Natalia wasn't ready to handle a baby. Without the maternity home's help, I don't think she would have gotten through her pregnancy and all the things that went on with her and her baby.

▬ Mark Jennings

I will be a junior in high school this year. I see myself as a young, energetic, mature, hot-tempered, black young lady. I have braces, brown eyes, 4'10".

My baby, Nakeem, is 16 months. My son's father and I had a real nice relationship. When I got pregnant, I was 14 and he was only 16. We both were still real young and we had a lot to learn.

I told my son's father I was pregnant the day I found out. He was real happy until stuff started coming in. You know, you got to buy a crib, you got to get a car seat, you got to get this and that. And then he was, like, "A baby is expensive," you know. So then his excitement started dying down.

I was living with a foster parent at the time, and she was the second person I told. I had been abused by my stepfather when I was 14, and I came into foster care and started living with my foster mother.

My mother was the last person I told.

I thought about all my options. I talked to my pastor and I talked to my foster mother. I could always have the baby and give

it up for adoption, if I couldn't care for it, you know. So I looked at that. Abortion is like the absolute last resort.

I called Catholic Charities, and they was sending adoptive parents out to my house to talk to me and everything. I wanted an open adoption where they would care for my child, but I would still be able to see my son and still have a relationship.

And then, my foster mother was telling me, you know, that is not right, because why should somebody be taking care of my child and see me, because the baby is going eventually to get confused, you know, and have to make a decision.

She made it real easy for me. She said, "Just keep the baby and stay here." So, that is what I did.

My foster mother and I got into a lot of disagreements and the fact is that I have a very bad temper, and I would say a lot of mean things to hurt her. Finally, I realized that I shouldn't be here if I was going to keep saying things like that. And when I had got pregnant, her real daughter got jealous. Her mother was paying so much attention to me and the baby, and we started not liking each other. So I just thought that it was time for me to leave. My son was about four months, and we left my foster mother's house.

To this day, she still wants me to come back, but I will not come back. I always know that I have a place there, but I still don't call it my home.

My biological mother, she doesn't even acknowledge my son. She has never seen my son. Never just calls and says, "How are you doing?" or nothing.

Before I told her I was pregnant, we were talking about me coming back home, you know. And then, when I told her I was pregnant, she was like, "Well, yeah, you can still come home, but you got to get rid of that baby first." And I said, "Well, I don't know if that is what I want to do just yet." And she is like, "Well, if you want to come home, that is what you better do." So I'm not going home, never. Never again. We don't talk about the baby.

In prenatal care, they checked for my blood pressure, my weight, make sure everything was OK with my pills.

You went through classes where they showed films of women having their babies, and it was fascinating watching those things. They talked to you about what to expect. We went on tours of the hospital where we would have our baby. We talked about our pregnancies, and how our bodies were changing and things like that.

They talked to me about low birthweight a lot, because I was humongous, and when I had my sonogram, there was this little baby. They were wondering why I was so big and my baby was so small. And they kept telling me, "Oh, you are going to have a small baby, and he is going to be short, but he will make it. And as long as you go the 36 weeks, everything will be fine." They talked about premature labor and things like that.

We went to the Neo Intensive Care Unit in the hospital, where the premature babies were kept in there. The first time I saw a NICU baby, I just cried. Because it was a tiny little baby, and he had all these tubes hooked up to him.

If my son was hooked up to the machines and respirators, and they were keeping him alive, and he couldn't do it on his own and never could, then I would want for God to take him. But if he could get better, then I would want my baby to live and be healthy and grow. He might be a little small, even if he was retarded or something, I would still want my child. It is just really scary to see something like that, because you never know.

Well, doctors can be wrong, because he was a big baby and he was *22* inches long. He weighed seven pounds, ten ounces. He was far from small.

Everything in my life has changed. Everything. I have learned to sacrifice like I don't know what. I went to parties, eating, movies, dates—kind of the same things I do now, it is just I don't do it as often.

A baby is a lot of work. I mean, even if you are married and you stay home with the kids, you are going to need a break. I am a teenager and I have a child. I need a break, too, just like everybody else needs a break. A child can get on your nerves.

After I got pregnant, I was still together with my son's father and he got involved in drugs, so I stopped dealing with him. Now he is incarcerated, so he don't have too much to do with us.

He didn't tell anybody he was there, because he thought he was coming home soon. He was gone for, like, two months, so when he realized he had a three year sentence, you know, that is when he said, "I had better tell somebody I'm here." We didn't nobody know where he was at. We reported him missing. And then it came up on the computer a week later that he had been in jail all the time. So, I was like, "— Oh!"

I take my son to see him, because he still wants a relationship and I won't deny my son his father. When he comes home, you know, they can have a relationship together.

I get angry a lot because I feel like he did not have to go out there and sell drugs, because money wasn't the issue with us. He was spoiled. He had everything. He didn't have to do it.

I just get real frustrated. When I look at it now, I am doing everything by myself. I work, I go to school, I have to take care of my son. I have to do everything by myself. But his father can't help us now. When I need him, he is never around.

I think I will marry my son's father. We have broken up, but we have remained close friends, really close friends, and right now he wants us to get back together. But I have a boyfriend, now. That is one of the complications.

I don't force my son on him, but my boyfriend does not really accept him. He talks about my son like he is a third person or he is not even in the room, you know. We were going to buy a new stroller for my son, and he said he would buy the stroller. Well, when I picked out the $100 stroller, he had a conniption. And he was like, "I am not going to spend $100 on a stroller for your son. Your son is your responsibility. I will buy him a stroller, but not a $100 stroller." I said, "OK, this one, a $70 stroller." He said, "No." We go to the $40 stroller. I am like, "No, I will buy my son his own stroller. Just forget it."

My son's father is from New York, so he is in jail in New York. He has a three-year sentence. And whenever we go, we have to get permission, like, two weeks ahead of time, before you can go to New York because we are not supposed to go out of our state without a social worker's permission.

He has served one year and goes on parole this month. That's good, because he might be coming home. I am not sure whether he has to stay in New York or not.

He gets along fine with Nakeem, but Nakeem doesn't get along with him that well. One time we went to see his father. Nakeem hadn't seen him in, like, six months, and it was like he forgot who he was. When he saw him and his father was trying to hold him, he was crying and trying to come back to me and hitting him and stuff. And he just got real upset, you know, and he was like, "Why doesn't my son know me?" He will write me letters and things—"Don't let Nakeem forget me," and stuff like that.

I thought I was doing a good job because I was showing Nakeem pictures, and even now, if you show Nakeem a picture of his father, he will say, "Dada," you know. And when he sees him, it is, like, a totally different thing. It is, like, "I don't want to be around you."

I think his father is more hurt than I am by it. But I know how his father feels about him, so I try to instill in Nakeem that he is loved by both his parents, you know.

Sex education never helped because I never read it. You can talk and talk and talk, and the mind of a teenager is going to always do what he or she wants to do.

So even if I sat down and had two hours every day with somebody, you know, about sex education and AIDS and STDs, they are still going to have to come to that point where they can make decisions to do it or not to do it.

If it were my say, I would just have all the information there for them, you know, anything they needed. Any type of birth control they need, I would make it available to them so that they can have safe sex, because everybody can't go to their parents, or won't feel comfortable with their parents, you know, asking for birth control.

I feel like if you are going to do it, do it right. You know, have protection. We weren't using protection, because I was scared to go to my mother. We did use condoms, and it burst. It was like an off-and-on thing. We used them sometimes, sometimes we didn't. I was seven weeks pregnant when I found out. The next week, I started prenatal care. They gave me my pills, so that helped, because I had to take iron and vitamins. They make you sick. They make you nauseous. They make you vomit. I mean, I hated vitamins. Like, six months before he was born, I stopped taking them, because I just couldn't handle it. And I felt like if I ate right and, you know, tried to get everything the vitamins had in them, then I would be OK.

Now, I have Norplant. I've had it a little over a year. The first week you get it your arm is bruised from the incision, and that is about it.

It was so odd, I went to the doctor to get birth control, and he told me I was pregnant. And at the time, I was listening to my foster mother. I was going to get the birth control, and he told me I was pregnant. That was like, "Oh, God!"—the worst day of my life. I cried. I almost fainted.

When I was pregnant, I used to cry when the supermarket didn't have what I wanted. You know, like, I went to the supermarket one day to get some pineapples, because I was in love with fruit. I went there to get some pineapples, and they had closed the fruit bar, and I cried so much this woman opened the fruit bar back up so I could get some pineapples. I mean, little things like that. I used to be just really petty when I was pregnant.

But then, afterward, I just got depressed. I was unhappy with the way I looked, because your body goes to heck after you have a baby.

After I had my son, those—what do they call them, postpartum blues?—they got me. He had colic, and he was crying and crying, and I am like, "I got to get away from him." I could not handle it. And my foster mother, she was helping me out when I needed it, you know. But if it was something she thought I could deal with, I had to deal with it.

Everybody can't do it by themselves, but, you know, there is a lot of options out there and resources that can help you.

After I had my son, it was like, you know, you have somebody now to set an example for. It hasn't set me back. It has made me strive. It has made me strive more, because when I was 15, in ninth grade, I had failed that year, and I wasn't even pregnant then. Now, you have to show him that you can do it. His father has a GED, and if I get my GED, my son can look at us and say, "Well, you and Mom got a GED, so I can do it, too."

I want to be an obstetrician. I have straight As. I know I can go to college and med school. I am very fortunate enough to have an aunt who loves me, who will do anything for me. His grandmother is there. If I just say, "I'm tired of Nakeem, I want you to take him," they will do it.

It is going to be hard for me to go to college, and to get through med school, and to care for a child. I know within myself that I am a strong person, that I can do it. So he might have to go to my aunt's house for a while, you know, until I got finished.

I want to live in Baltimore, and Johns Hopkins University has already talked to me about a scholarship. Loyola has talked to me about a scholarship. If I go to night school for my last class, I can graduate high school this year.

I don't believe that everything in life is just fate, because we have been through some really rough times, and I think that we couldn't have got through it without God. My son has almost died, and I know we have not gotten through it without God. On July 6th, they diagnosed my son with Kawasaki's disease, a viral disease that they think comes from Japan, but they don't know how they catch it or how you get it or anything. And he had a fever of 110. His lips blistered and swelled. His eyes turned red. His immune system was so low he kept contracting diseases on top of that; and he had ear, nose, and throat infections on top of it; urinary tract infections on top of it.

I mean, he had everything. His whole body had peeled. His immune system was just low. His T-cells were low.

And the main thing with Kawasaki's is it clogs the arteries that pump blood to the heart, and that is what had started happening. And his heartbeat was slowing down and things.

It can go on for a couple of years. He has had one relapse since then with the fever, and his body was still peeling, and they found an abnormal bacteria in his blood. We have to go next week to get that checked out. And the inflammation levels in his body are real high, so he takes medicine for that.

So my son has been through a lot, and I don't feel that without God we could have got through it. Because, I mean, they were just losing hope for him, you know, and my son has just been through a lot.

I know that my son will be OK. I have faith that my son will be OK, you know. So I try not to worry about it. It can get you really down sometimes, but I try not to worry about it.

Family really wasn't important to me until I came into my foster mother's home and I saw how their family was so close-knit, and how I was accepted into their family, and how she talked to us about everything and anything. And I thought, "Well, that is the way I want to be, you know, with my children."

I know no family is perfect, but I know how to achieve the type of family that I want, and the type of relationship I want to have with my husband and my kids. My son is not going to have that many people to look up to but his mother, his father, and his immediate family. I just want them to be there for him.

— Interviewed by Mark Jennings, 16

Raphael

Raphael, 17 *third year, 11*

Raphael's this Spanish guy. He was wearing glasses and a baseball cap, backwards. He looks like a college student. He's seen a lot of stuff happen and has a lot of anger still inside. It was hard for him to bring up his family, like about his brother being a drug addict. He had a lot to say. ■ He's someone you can talk to over the phone and not even know what he looks like and know he is very confident. And pretty smart and he was the coolest. He was very sure of himself, but not conceited—someone I would go to for advice, someone I could see like an older brother. ■ Osiris Adorno and Chrystal Dunbar

I've always learned that there's no such thing as perfection. However, if there was a chance that we would have a perfect world, I would think the world would have to be free of racism, free of violence, and free of drugs and all that stuff that youth have succumbed to today.

Also free of the disastrous thing we call politics. To me, politics is what stems all that's going on today. I don't really blame the youth. I blame the government for allowing all this to take place.

The problem with the government today, from a youth standpoint, is that they just tackle one issue at a time. But they really have spent too much time on one issue when they should be taking everything into account. You know what I'm saying?

And they also have to start listening to youth. If it were up to me, I would make sure I would get youth representatives on the government, because it is the youth that makes tomorrow.

My neighborhood, it just gets worse every year, year after year. 'Cause I can remember as a little kid growing up, I really didn't see so much. Everything was basically cool.

But then as the years progressed, I see all the paraphernalia on the street. I see little green top caps, all that stuff, little crack vials. Today, I see youth on the corners selling—even on my corner.

I live in a neighborhood where anything could happen. Surprised to say it does, in fact, make me scared. And sometimes nothing could happen for weeks. Like, maybe, the past three months, I could have walked up and down my street. Nothing would have happened to me. But in these times, anything could happen.

I see gang members on my street. I'd rather not mention the gangs in particular, because, you know, things could stem from that. These kids, a lot of them have family problems. See, they don't just, like, join gangs and buy guns and hang around with the wrong crowd because they want to. It's because, in some ways, they have to. And it's not only kids either, it's people my age, people 18, 19 years old. People that got to support families go out there.

It gets worse, because youth have psychological problems. They have social problems. They have emotional family problems. And they can't deal with this unless they go out and try to make themselves strong, and sometimes violence is one of the only ways they could think of. Nothing is there for them to keep them occupied.

I'm going off to college next year. And hopefully I'm gonna go off to a place where it may be like country, rural, and I'll get away from all this. But I still have to worry about my parents' safety, and my cousins' safety, and my little friends' safety. I worry about the survival of youth. I fear for my descendants.

If I talk to some ten-year-old about, "Don't do that, 'cause you don't want to get mixed in with that crowd," they're brainwashed by someone else already. Some gang member or something goes and tells them, "This is the way you got to get out of that family, all right. You come and join our family. We'll be your family. You don't need them."

These little kids don't know who to listen to. There really isn't much to be done, except have hope that maybe some youth will see the light.

People don't really talk things out anymore. There are other ways to try and settle conflicts. Unfortunately that's one of the big things today in youth. They have to resort to gang violence, guns, all that stuff.

One of the best things that ever happened to me is I've been kept away from all this—the fact that God gave me the strictest parents in the world. There was not one time I remember growing up playing with little boys, little girls. They kept me away. They didn't want me to ever get involved in the streets.

And I've had a Catholic school education, a private school education. I'm not in a public school where people would think all this takes place.

Unfortunately there's stupid people, very ignorant people who think that in a Catholic school you don't see none of this happen, 'cause yes, you do see it happen. A Catholic school and a public school, they're both the same thing. It's just an education. But the difference is I've had a safer education.

My brother is 27 years old right now. He lives with my parents. My brother, unfortunately, at my age, he had already succumbed to this community that he lived in. He fell to these drugs, all right. Thank God, he didn't sell and he didn't get involved in the gangs. But he knew gang members. He knew the right people to get what he wanted.

My brother is a substance abuser, OK. He's an alcoholic. There have been times he'd come home high.

My brother quit high school when he was a sophomore. He dropped out. But he makes more money in a job as a chef than people who have a high school diploma would dream to make. He's been gifted. But I'm sorry to say he just takes that money and puts it to his nose—if I could be a little nasty there for a second.

Sometimes those rehabilitation centers don't work at all. My brother went to one when he was about 25. They didn't do him any good. Once you're hooked on it, it's hard to get off.

My brother is an adult and he can take care of himself, regardless of what my parents think or say. Sometimes they baby him, and my mother, especially, thinks that I don't know.

He's been jealous of me, but also, unfortunately, I've been jealous of him a little, because I really can't see a mother or a father today keeping a 27-year-old drug addict in their house. It's hard for me. I can't see a mother and father keeping even a 14-, 15-year-old drug user, all right? I'm from a Hispanic family, and some Hispanics really don't take this shit—excuse my language—they just really don't take it. Throw them out of the house, they're gone. Not my parents.

Of course, I'd have to admire my parents for what they've gone through, and remaining a family unit, and remaining united as a couple.

I see myself in the future behind the desk, of course, because I am going to be a doctor. I see myself as a cardiologist, or maybe chiropractor. I haven't decided, but I'm going to have a career in medicine.

I'm going to raise my family. I'm going to do some searching, some serious searching, for an environment where I could raise my kids, where they will be away from all this, just like my parents kept me away from all of it. Although, I was in a place where anything could have happened.

Although my parents meant well, I kind of think my childhood was taken away from me, because—I'm not ashamed to say this—I don't think there's one sport I could play perfectly.

Usually a 17-year-old boy has mastered, by now, basketball, or whatever, baseball. But not me, 'cause when I was little, didn't have a chance to play that, didn't have a chance to play anything. I was kept away. I was sheltered.

When I turned, maybe, 15, 16, I started to get a little rebellious with my parents. I wanted to live my own life. Today, sometimes, my parents have the audacity to call me rude and obnoxious. I just think that's really wrong, because, if anything, it's their fault that I am this way.

I'll tell my kids, "Don't worry, I'll do the best I can to give you your childhood," but you know, I won't let them go through what I went through. I'll give them their life, because today I can't do some things that other boys could do. One day I may even learn to do these things. But hey, time is a factor here.

Right now is, like, "Am I gonna get to see my future? Am I gonna get to see it all and do things the way I wanted to do them?" I'm not going to be able to, probably, but hey, I just gotta have hope—and not worry too much about fear right now. That's what I'm doing, taking it one day at a time and living the life the way I'm supposed to live it.

It's time America woke up, OK. Not just the government of Connecticut. Not just Bridgeport. Not just New Haven. We're talking about the United States here. It's time we woke up and we fought this once and for all. Before things get worse in the future.

Interviewed by Osiris Adorno, 17 and Chrystal Dunbar, 16

Paula

Paula, 18

We knew that we were going to talk to teen moms. What we didn't know was how much they would share with us. ▬ At first the girls didn't seem to trust the three of us. Then they began talking with each other, asking each other questions. I was amazed over and over by the young ages at which these girls experienced sex. Most of them had been sexually active by age 12 or 13, and were surprised to hear that many of my friends, at age 17, were still virgins. To them, sex seemed to be accepted and expected. They very rarely mentioned love when talking about their sexual experiences, and many regretted their pregnancies. ▬ One exception was Paula. Not only was her baby conceived out of love, but she planned her pregnancy. Her story is not the stereotypical teen mother's story. ▬ Amy Weisenbach

My father is my favorite person in my family, I guess because he's a deacon. I mean, he's always been very supportive, although he hides behind religion a lot of times.

I like to write, I like to read fictional novels and autobiographies. Most of all I like to take my child swimming.

Right now I'm living in a house with my fiance. When we first moved into that house, it was basically an all-white neighborhood. We live down the street from a hospital. The parks are kept clean. It's not a lot of children. There are older folks and people who have retired, or people who own their own business and they're at home—let somebody else take care of their business.

I have one daughter, ten months. Her name is Paula also. I've been engaged for about two-and-a-half years and it's to her father. We both graduated from high school together, so he's going to go into the service. We had set a date, but he didn't want to wait that long. He wants to get married as soon as he comes out of boot camp—December, January, I don't know.

I had planned the pregnancy. I had been having some uterine problems and I knew I wanted to have children before they give me a hysterectomy. I had been trying for about six months and I wasn't successful. When I found out, I was quite happy, and my family was supportive. I don't regret it.

When my child was coming, I couldn't even go anywhere. I was tired of being pregnant. It was a hassle. The only thing I didn't like about my pregnancy was labor. I carried my child for ten months and she still didn't want to come out, so they induced my labor.

I think the first day of labor didn't hurt, but it was the second and the third day that I got to hurting so hard. After the third day of labor, I just asked them to give me a Caesarean. Sometimes I wish I just had waited.

I'm a manic depressant [sic], and I knew that I couldn't have custody of my daughter. My worst fear was going through court, giving custody to her father. I mean, I knew I couldn't have custody of her because sometimes, when I'm real depressed, she could be hungry and I know she's hungry, and I would not go get her to feed her...it's not ignoring her. So somebody has to always be around me when I have her. I knew what was coming before I had her.

I mean, it's disadvantages to having a child at a young age—especially when you don't plan a child and have no support—but there are a lot of advantages.

After you hold her at the hospital and know she's yours and she's all this small and I was breast feeding her, it was the connection. I really didn't want to give him custody of her, but it was the right decision.

For me, having a daughter, it's taught me who I was. It made me more aware of where I was in life, where I wanted to be and how I was gonna get there.

The one good thing I can say about my mother is I can talk to her about anything, and whatever I decided, she was willing and open to give me opportunities to do whatever I wanted to do. I could have sex in her house, but I could not have sex in her bed. I could not have sex in front of her kids. I could not have sex while I was watching her kids.

At the age of 12 or 13 I was having sex without my mother's consent, and I was doing things that I saw in the movies, like my mom was doing with her husband. I wasn't doing it 'cause my friends was doing it, 'cause where I live, they weren't having sex. They weren't coming outside, they weren't even dating. And their mothers weren't as open as my mother.

Once you start having sex, you begin to form a pattern where the sensation comes over you, and you want it again and again. It's not like you can start and then you can stop.

I'm the type of person where I'll talk to anybody's child about sex. I don't mind my child having sex, because I know how I felt when I was 13 years old, when I was 12 years old. Yes, I wanted to have sex.

I was curious, because my mother was the type of person where she brought home magazines. My mother was, "This is a part of life," and that's how I'll be with my child. This is a part of life. There's just certain things that I believe in.

I don't believe in hiding sex from a child, and I don't believe in punishing you because you have sex or have children, 'cause my mother didn't punish me. ■ **Interviewed by Michelle Huser, 13; Ilene Potasnik, 15; Peter Ryan, 13; and Amy Weisenbach, 17**

Alex, 17 *Kansas City, MO*

He's a Blood, you know, like Bloods and Crips. Physically, he has kind of dyed-brown hair. He was really nervous and he didn't want to be there. He didn't want to talk. He's shy. He was looking at the floor. I think he was just real afraid, being a gang member, that talking about gangs and things could get him in trouble. ■ Scarlett Arias and Willa Lo

I'm here at an alternative high school because I got kicked out of the regular school district for having a possession of a half-pound of marijuana at school. I was selling it in school. And I have a drug problem, too.

Well, I really don't feel I have a problem with drugs, or alcohol. I just started smoking weed about two-and-a-half years ago. I never had any accidents with drugs or alcohol besides that incident I had in school.

I've been clean for about a week. I don't have a problem. The reason why I feel I don't have a problem is because I won't do anything for drugs, you know. I don't smoke crack or nothing like that. So I feel that there's not a problem. I won't steal from my mother, you know, or rob people for some weed or nothing like that. That's why I feel I don't have a problem. It's really not hard getting off drugs. It depends on if you really want to get off of drugs, then it's fairly easy. It depends on which drug you used.

I was in jail six months for getting caught with the half-pound of marijuana in school. And really, why I didn't hit bottom is because you know I got a little boy and he's nine months. And I got one on the way. And that made me realize that being in jail was not what it was cracked up to be.

Basically, when my boy gets older, I don't want him to go through some of the same things that I went through, like going to jail, and selling drugs, and things like that—just to make ends meet. I want him to get out and do what he's supposed to do to succeed in life.

Hopefully, the other baby, he or she will follow the right path, too. I'll try to lead them in the right direction, just spend as much time as I can, and let him know how much I care about him. So, you know, he can talk to me about anything, and won't hide nothing from me. So he'll know what's up and I'll know what's up.

My father and my mother separated when I was about four years old. So really, I didn't have a father figure in the house. But that really didn't matter to me, and it still don't matter to me. When my mother was hollering at me, yelling at me, I didn't really pay no attention to her, you know, until everything hit the fan and I started getting in trouble. So now I see where she was coming from, when she was trying to stress some of the facts that she was stressing back then. Because my mother, she tries, and she does everything she can to lead me in the right direction. So now, I'm trying to hook everything up, stay on the right path.

My family didn't drive me to drugs, 'cause I had a fairly good childhood. Really, my main downfall was my neighborhood, 'cause I got hooked up with them, hanging around them. I wanted to have some of the things they had—have my pockets fat like theirs.

So they hooked me up, and from then on I just did everything illegal. I didn't want to go to school, you know, didn't like school. The only time I went to school was when I wanted to sell some weed to somebody or something.

Most of my friends are in gangs. I'm an inactive gangmember right now. I'm a Blood. That's where I really started smoking weed. You know, everybody just hanging out on the corner, chillin', shooting dice, you know, smoking weed, drinking 40-ounces, and that's how I got hooked up with everything.

I'm still considered a Blood, but you know I don't go around stressing it. I don't sweat no Crips, you know. It's like this, I know

Between 1985 and 1991 the share of all births in Missouri that were to single teens rose by 32%

what we fighting for is really over neighborhoods. Money is the root of all evil right now, amongst anything. Mainly money, power and respect and your 'hood.

Really being a Blood, you know, ain't really what it's cracked all out to be. It's just that you want to belong to something, you know, you want to belong to a big group of something. So you gotta join a gang.

The reason why I'm really still in the Bloods is because that's my neighborhood and that's what I'm down with. And I ain't gonna sell out on them you know. I don't want to be labeled as a sell out. I am inactive, so I really don't take part in the fightings, the shoot outs, the drive-bys, like I used to.

Really, the only thing I could say is, you know, stay away from gangs and gangmembers, 'cause it's a one way ticket to death or jail. Only can go one of two places, death or jail.

I tell my friends that all the time. They just say they ain't gonna never stop. They think, you know, it's gonna go on forever but, you know, who am I really to tell them, when I just stopped doing it myself? Who am I? Just stopped living the lifestyle that they living right now myself. So I'd just tell them, you know, do the right thing.

My living situation is I'm with my mother right now. You know, staying with her. But the situation with my baby's mother is there's really no situation—she's staying with her mother. She's 17. She's still in school and she was still in school while she was pregnant.

As soon as I really find out what I really want to do, you know, maybe we can hook'a little something up. I can be around my kids more, spend more time with them.

I really don't want to get married, but, you know, maybe later on in a few years it might pop up. It's not really the fact of not wanting to be tied down or something, I'm just not ready.

I ain't really planning on going to college, but if I have to, I will. If that's the route I gotta go to to really get my family to where I want them, that's what I'll have to do.

I want to be a car salesman. They make good money. I'd be sitting fat, and that's something I could really work into, you know. I could really get into selling cars, 'cause I like selling things, you know. Meanwhile, I'm just doing what I've been doing. ■ **Interviewed by Scarlett Arias, 14 and Willa Lo, 16**

Randy

Randy, 19 *Manifesto XII*

I originally knew Randy from my high school. He was a hard worker, but basically kept to himself most of the time. I never knew much about his life outside school. He was quiet and composed, and always seemed to have a smile on his face. That's why it shocked me so much to find out that he had lost a brother. Through the whole interview I expected him to cry, but he never did. I realized afterwards that he had already gotten through it, and now, six years later, he had no trouble talking about it to other people, and letting them know that you never know what can happen. ■ **Serene Satterlund**

My brother Daniel choked on a marshmallow. He was one year and three months. I was in fifth grade, so it would be six years ago.

It started out with a bonfire at some friends' house and he was in a stroller, and everybody was around the campfire roasting marshmallows. Me and some of my friends went up to another person's house to play in the puddles, and when we got back, everybody was sitting around. About two minutes later, my mom started screaming, and everybody looked, and his face was turning deep blue. So everybody just went into a panic, because nobody really knew what to do at the time. Then, about 30 seconds to a minute later, my dad gained control of his thoughts and he started to try to get the marshmallow out. They didn't know it was a marshmallow at the time. And then the ambulance came. After the ambulance left, everybody took off. My mom and dad rode in the ambulance, and I had to stay at people's houses until my grandma got here.

I was there when he died. I mourned quite a long time. The most severe part was about a week-and-a-half to two weeks. It was to the extent where I didn't even go to school for the whole time. I think about it every time I go by the graveyard; it's right next to my grandma's house.

First, I thought it was my fault, because I wasn't there, so I decided I was going to take off and just basically stayed away from everybody for about a week to a week-and-a-half. Then, I realized it wasn't anybody's fault, you can't put the blame on anybody. So then I started working it out and talking to people.

He was in Intensive Care when he was born, and for three days after, and he was also diagnosed that he might have cerebral palsy when he gets older. So in the long run, it might have been better, but I wish I would have found out first if he had it or not.

I started taking CPR and first aid classes, and tried to learn as much as I can about life saving through all the stages, all the way up to adulthood.

I'm more careful. I've been trained as a lifeguard and when I'm at the beach, I can't swim and enjoy myself anymore. When a lot of kids are around, I watch kids. And if I'm in a group area, I always watch for the accidents. I don't have that much fun. I always have in the back of my mind that I'm looking for an accident to happen. ▬ **Interviewed by Serene Satterlund, 16**

Carla, 18 ~Tampa~

Carla is a very good looking young lady. She's Puerto Rican, light-skinned, dark brown hair. She was dressed New York style, Brooklyn style. She had baggy jeans, a T-shirt like a fly girl, one of those hoodlum girls with the big earrings, lipstick, whatever. ▬ She said that she has a kid seven months old. And the boyfriend just left. If the guy's gonna have a kid, first of all he should have responsibilities. He better think before he does that. ▬ Carla plans to succeed in life. And you know, she has a lot going for her. I wish her the best of luck.
▬ Rolando Liriano and Eric Zamora

It's boring around here. We live in the senior citizen part of town. It's boring. It's frustrating.

I have a seven-month-old child, a little girl.

I don't have a boyfriend. I don't go out with the baby's father. Things didn't work out. Just because we had a baby that doesn't mean we had to stay together so, like, three or four months ago we broke up.

It didn't really affect me any way 'cause my parents helped me. My parents, if I need something, they'll help in any way just so I don't have to call him and make him feel like, you know, I can't do it without him or whatever. So my parents, they helped me out. They do everything. They don't do everything, 'cause I have a job and I support my own kid.

I thought about having an abortion, right. But they're too expensive. And that's another problem I had with this guy, 'cause he thought, "Since she's pregnant, she can go through with it." And I didn't want to tell my parents. So we thought about it. I started asking people to borrow money, and I tried to get a job and shit. But by the time the money would've been saved up for that, it would have been too late. Then people started tell me shit about, "That's murder," and stuff. So I told my parents, 'cause I needed money, and then they just told me to go ahead—that they would help me with it, not to feel that he's the only person that can help me. And they feel bad and everything but, you know, they said that they was gonna help me do it, and they did. So I didn't get an abortion. But I have a lot of friends who have had abortions. It's something that a lot of people do, you know. So their parents won't find out and shit.

I am in school. I had to quit before, when I was 16, but I'm back. I didn't stay out of school for a long time. I dropped out in about February and I went back in June.

We don't really have violence in our school. There's a lot of fighting, but that's like in every school, you know. But schoolmates and stuff, around in poor Tampa, they steal a lot of cars, they do a lot of fighting. Almost every guy in that school that's down with a crew, or whatever, they all have guns. They always fight against other places. Because there's a place called Town and Country, it's real close. They'll fight Town and Country or they'll fight other places, but they're always fighting, and it's real bad.

When did Rico die? Like, two months ago, or one month. Yeah, it was two guys in our school, they stole a car. And then, see, that's another thing in Tampa, that since they steal so much cars, the police like to chase them or whatever. And they chased these guys. And they got so nervous that they ran off the road and everything. And Rico died. Our friend Rico died.

He died because of the accident. But it was him and this guy, I forgot the other guy's name. The other guy is expecting a baby. And then Rico, they put him in the hospital and they had him on life support, right. But his parents couldn't afford to have him on life support, so they had to take him off that machine, and when they did, he died. But it all boils down to the cop chasing him and running him off the road, or whatever.

I didn't know him as good as everyone else did. But I still felt bad. You know, to see everyone else upset, he was somebody important to everybody and now, you know, he's not here with us anymore, 'cause of something stupid. If he would have thought about it, then—I don't know. And if he would've stopped, you know, when they tried to stop him, then maybe he would still be here today, you know. 'Cause that could have been anybody. They didn't hurt anybody else, but they could've hurt someone else. And look at him, he's not here with us anymore. So he made the wrong choice.

I try to stay away from violence. We have bad habits, me and my girls, but not, like, violence. We fight. I ain't gonna lie, we fight. But you'll never catch me with a gun or anything like that. It ain't all about that. We'll fight. Sometimes we even do it for fun. But we don't go out trying to hurt nobody, you know. Violence, no. We have bad habits, that's it.

I smoke cigarettes. I smoked, like, for a year and then, when I got pregnant, I had to stop. And I've been smoking now, just cigarettes every now and then, you know, I'm not a chain smoker or anything. When I'm out with my girls, we'll drink. That's about it. We've smoked weed a couple of times. We've tried it, we're friends, you know. But we don't do that all the time. If anything we do all the time is we'll smoke cigarettes. And we'll drink, and no hard liquor or anything, mostly just beer or coolers or whatever. Sometimes, it depends on who has it if somebody brings it, because we don't buy or anything, but if somebody brings it, we'll smoke out. That's about it. And those are the only bad habits we have—that and fighting. But nothing that'll harm anybody else, other than the fighting. But if they fuck with us we'll survive it. Tampa's all right. I mean, this side of town where you are right now is boring, boring. You have nothing to do but to sit around.

I'm getting in the Army.

Correction—I'm gonna get in the Air Force. Ten years from now I see myself supporting my kid, you know, doing the right thing. Ten years from now she'll be ten, she'll be in school. I don't know if I'll be with somebody by then, but I know I'll be with my kid and everything will be all right. It'll probably be hard, you know. I've been told that the more time that goes by, the harder it's gonna get. But it'll be OK.

One, I want to see my kid grow up and not make the same mistakes that I did. I want her to be smart and not think on her ass. Two, I want to make a future for myself. I want to have a family. I wouldn't mind having any more kids, you know, like a good ten years from now. And number three, I want to live a good life, have my own house, have my own car. I wouldn't have to depend on nobody. Just hold my own. ■ **Interviewed by Rolando Liriano, 17 and Eric Zamora, 18**

Cathleen, 14 *Washington, DC*

You know, I saw a lot of her in me. It was terrible. She's my age. She's nine-and-a-half months pregnant! She's 14, but she's not 14. ■ She has all this added responsibility, when I'm worried about cleaning my room. ■ I think she's having the baby to keep her boyfriend around. She wants someone who can love her. She needs love and she doesn't get it from anywhere. I don't think she even knows what love is. ■ I looked at her, and I saw me, and it scared me to death. I was so upset, I couldn't fall asleep that night. I stayed awake all night thinking about this girl and what is she going to do with this baby? She has to think about her life and where it is going. ■ Courtney Snowden

If I had to describe myself, I'd say I'm pregnant, brown-skinned, 5'7", and I look older than what I am. That's what most people say—I look 17.

My father, he was really strict and stuff. He used to follow me and stuff, to see where I go. So I just stopped dating boys. He left ten months ago, because my mother had a nervous breakdown. She said she was going to kill him because of things he did to her in the past. He heard her say that I was going to help kill him, so he left. He went to Alabama to stay with his mother and brother. When he left, that's when I got pregnant. I met boys at school, in my neighborhood, at the movies, and at my sister's house.

My mom, she cared and everything, but she didn't really act like she cared, 'cause my sister, she had her first child when she was 12, and the man she had it by was 25.

My sister was really mature, she looked like she was 20 herself. It just runs in the family. She just developed real fast, and just started going out with boys much older than her. My mother was hardly ever home. She was always at work. She didn't really even know that my sister was having sex or anything.

I was over at my sister's house when I first started having sex—this was last year—and my sister called my father's house and said that I had a venereal disease. I caught it from the first person that I had sex with. I had chlamydia. The boy that gave it to me—at first he wasn't going to believe me—but he went to a doctor and got checked up and got a cure for it.

But then my sister called my father and told my father that I had chlamydia, so he came to my room and he told me, "Are you having sex?" And I said, "No!" And he said, "Yes you are, because your sister just called me and told me you've got a venereal disease, and the only way you can catch a venereal disease is by having sex." My mother was sitting right in the room. I was telling my father, and she said that she never knew. And I kept on saying, "No!" because it was none of his business. But then, next day, I told him. I admitted and stuff, and they didn't even try to get me on birth control pills or nothing. They didn't buy me no condoms, nothing.

I tried my best to get something. I was on birth control for three months, and then it started making me sick, so I stopped taking it. I was having sex with that same boy. I only had sex with him two times while I was on birth control pills. And then, when I got off of them, that's when I had to stay at my sister's house for a while, 'cause I was going to a different school. So I went over to my sister's house, and that's when I got pregnant.

I didn't tell my mother that I was pregnant, she told me. She said that I looked like I was pregnant, and I was always getting sick and stuff. She said, "Are you pregnant?" and I said, "No." I didn't even know that I was pregnant until she sent me to this place for a pregnancy test. She knew before me. My mother just said, "I knew it." Then she said, "Well, are you going to keep it?" And I said, "Yeah. I may give it up for adoption, but I'm not going to have an abortion. I don't care how many times I get pregnant, I'm not going to have an abortion." My mother's real understanding, so we didn't say anything more about that. She just said, "I hope you don't lose this baby." My sister lost four of her kids to miscarriages, so she thought that would happen to me too.

When I found out I was pregnant, I tried to kill myself to terminate the pregnancy. Then, about two months ago, I took an overdose of pills, because I was getting tired of waiting for this baby. They had me in the hospital and they had to pump my stomach and everything. From that, my baby got fetal arrhythmia. Its heartbeat skipped. They say that most likely the skipped beats will go away before I have my baby. I was supposed to have the baby already, but I took sleeping pills and vitamins and that makes the pregnancy longer.

They told me, "Don't be under no stress or nothing," so I don't want to take pills and stuff. So the other night, my two little sisters were bothering me, saying that I was crying all the time and I said that, "Y'all just don't understand why I cry." I say, "Because I'm under a lot of pressure right now." They was laughing and stuff, so when they left I went down the hall and I got a whole bottle of pills. I was getting ready to take them, but my sister and her newborn baby was up there at my house, and I was thinking about that I was going to have a baby one day, so I didn't take them.

When I first started getting prenatal care, they was giving me vitamins that were making me sick, so I wasn't taking my vitamins. And they was saying that my baby was going to be premature. That's when I changed. I was going to a free clinic then, because I didn't have no Medicaid or nothing like that, and then my mother applied for Medicaid for me. So then, I went to another hospital and they were giving me better care. I was going every week and I wasn't even nine months into my pregnancy and I was going every two weeks.

If my father was down here I wouldn't have gotten pregnant! I never came outside when my father was down here. The only time I saw daylight was when I went to the store to go grocery shopping or get some stuff to clean up the house, or go back and forth to school. He used to never let me go out to go nowhere, and then, when I got out, I did just what I saw everyone else doing. I know that it's my fault. I'm the one who got pregnant. But in my mind, it's coming from my father, because he's the one that put things in my head—like I'm supposed to be so perfect and stuff—and he always used to follow me, and that made me really mad. That made me really, really want to get back at him. This is the way of me getting back at him, but he don't want to take care of the baby. I can understand that but...I wanted to get back at him so bad, though.

I always wanted to have my baby when I was 16. I just wanted to, because if you have a baby when you're too old, then you can have problems. Then, if you have the baby too young you can have problems—when you're 14 or 15, stuff like that. But 16, it's not a perfect age, but it's all right. You're body is not really mature and you should wait until you're 18, whatever, but I said that I wanted to have mine when I was 16. Unfortunately, I got pregnant, so I accept it.

It's real stressful, because of all the problems that I have. First of all, I'm a teenager and I'm pregnant. Then my mother had a nervous breakdown. Then my brother, he's nine years old, but he acts like he's about 20. He curses my mother out and he stays out real late at night. We stay at home just worried to death. My mother says don't worry about him, but I'm always worrying about everything.

I'm just like my father, and I hate that. He always was in control, he always had the house together. Everything used to be together like a family, but he was just strict. Now that he's gone, my mother can't do nothing with my brother. I'm his mother. She can't beat him because she has high blood pressure. When she puts him on punishment, he don't listen unless I'm there, and I can't be going around hitting him, chasing him around the streets, because I'm nine months pregnant. I could go into labor any day.

I want my baby to have a better life than mine is. I'm going to do my best at raising my child. I can do a good job, because my sister, she had six kids. I know what to do with kids, because she left them all day on me. I know what to do with kids. Most likely, my child will throw it up in my face that I had it while I was young and stuff, but I'll try to prevent that by telling them how my life was when I did get pregnant with him or her. If my child was to do something like that, throw it up in my face, I'd probably try to do something to myself, or try to do something to my child, because that's just what kind of temper I have.

Right now I'm just focusing on graduating from high school. I had to go to summer school to pass, because I was in high school during my pregnancy. So I passed summer school, and I'm glad about that. I think it's mandatory to graduate from high school. You just have to. My father dropped out of school after the fourth grade and he is just as dumb as I don't know what. I mean, I have to read stuff to him and things like that, fill out his job applications and stuff. The only thing that he really knows how to fill out is a construction worker's application. He knows the words on there because he's been a construction worker for so long—and a taxi cab driver, he knows about that.

I want to go to college and be a prosecutor. When I was 11 I got locked up and I do not think it was right, because these girls jumped me and bust my nose and my eardrum. These girls jumped me because a girl told them that I had called her a "bald-haired bitch." And I was coming home one day and they just jumped me. I went home all bloody, came back to school on Monday, and me and my sisters jumped them just the same as they jumped me—and we got locked up. And the girl who I had called a bald-haired bitch, I had broke her nose, because I had hit her in the face with a stick, and they charged me with assault.

I don't think it was right. They had me on probation for one whole year. I was 11 years old and was just fighting back because I was all by myself because I had my little brother, my little five-year-old brother, with me when those girls jumped me. And I do not think that was right. That's why I try to get into the judiciary system, because I do not think that they do right with certain cases.

Well, I just make do the best I can, because at the school that I'll be going to, they have day care and stuff. They have a special program to help me take care of my baby while I'm in school and stuff. I hope that it will be easy as I think it is. I mean, I know it won't be easy to graduate from high school and go to college with a child, but by the time I do graduate from high school, my child will be going to school, so that will be all right. Right now, my mother isn't working, so she can raise my baby while I'm going to school, because they don't take your baby until it's six weeks old. So most likely, I'll make it. I know I'm smart enough.

My sister was raped by my father. We have different fathers and she was raped by my father when she was nine years old. My mother denied it when my sister said that my father raped her.

I told my mother but she didn't ever believe us until one day years later, years later. My sister is grown, she's 21 now. She has six kids. Ever since she was nine, we've been trying to tell our mother that my father raped her, and she would never believe it, until last year. My sister was 20. My mother believed it, because my father admitted to it, finally. But she never believed us.

Between 1985 and 1991 the teen violent crime arrest rate for the District of Columbia increased by 43%.

And I also got raped, three times. I got raped by people in my neighborhood and one of my sister's best friend's boyfriend, and I told my mother. The first two times I got raped and I told her, she acted like she didn't even know what happened. When people used to talk about rape I'd get mad and cry and she'd be like, "What's wrong with you, what's wrong with you?" and I'd be like, "You don't know that I got raped," and stuff, and she'd be like, "When did you get raped?" and stuff like that.

I felt like somebody had stolen something from me, like there wasn't no reason to live.

The boys on my street used to always touch on me and stuff, and I never used to pay attention. I just used to let them, whatever. But these past two years, I finally realized what sex was supposed to be between two people, about sex and love and stuff. I mean, I know I'm young and all, but I do understand it because I have seen it, and I have been through it with my baby's father and one of my other friends. I know he did not love me, he just wanted sex. But I know that my baby's father, I know that he loves me, because I told him that I had sex with his best friend, and he still told me that he loved me and that he wanted to come over and see the baby. I just told him that to see if he really, really cared about me, and he's still calling me every single hour. And we only had sex two times.

I love him, but it's hard for me to say I love him. The other day he said, "Can't you say you love me?" and I said, "Nope." Then he said, "But do you love me?" and I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well then say it!" and I said, "But I can't say it, I don't know how." And he said, "Well all right, but I love you." ■ **Interviewed by Wendy Potasnik, 20 and Courtney Snowden, 14**

Cherith

Cherith, 17 *Ugandan '01*

Interviewing Cherith in an ordinary-looking home similar to our own, she seemed like a perfectly "normal" teenager. The story she told us was, however, nothing that a mainstream teenager could share with us. It was ironic how her life could be so much like ours, yet so different. ■ Talking to Cherith made us realize that Indians are people we can relate to, despite our differences. ■ Kelly Hartley and Joe Huser

My name is Cherith Crazy Boy Smith. I go by Cherith Smith. I am Piegan Blackfoot from Canada and Dakota from Rosebud. I'm a little more than three quarters Native American.

If you're gonna call me something, Indian is fine. Because it's only the politicians that usually use Native American Indian, which is politically correct right now. And the other thing that is politically correct is "people of color," and I think that's kind of separating the races even more.

I like my school because of the diversity of the population, and the diversity of the different people and their backgrounds, where they came from. We have Native American students. We have African-American students, oriental, Russian students, pretty much people from all over. We have a lot of activities that involve pretty much everyone. I started a Native American Indian Club. That's what I usually do during the after-school time that I have.

I find it a challenge being a Native American at my high school, because you are faced with a lot of different situations than any of the others, because you're facing a culture where you powwow on weekends. You have your own religion that no one else can understand. Most people look at you and they stereotype you.

Teachers tend to separate you from the other group. They usually don't know what to say to you when they're talking about Native American issues and such. And so they'll point you out in a discussion, and you are set up in front of the entire class, representing the entire Native American population, when you only represent one tribe out of 300 in the United States. And that is kind of hard. And often times, being a good student, they push you a lot more than they do the other people.

One thing that I heard someone say is that Native American youth are disempowered and disenfranchised. And that is something that, through education, we are slowly changing, although education doesn't seem to meet the needs of the Native American youth, because teachers don't realize that there are different needs for the Native American youth.

Culture is something very important, and in the past, often times people have made a show out of the Native American cultures. And nowadays, it's very hard for people to talk about their beliefs and stuff, because those are supposed to be kept secret. You don't really talk about that outside of your own culture, because there's always that fear of it being taken away, or of your culture being raped.

To get through this world and for our people to survive, it is very important that the youth take advantage of their education to show that they can make it in a white society. And being educated will teach them how to preserve their own culture to the best that they can.

The dropout rate is very high. Most Native American students that I know that are not urban Indians are thinking about dropping out right now, or see no purpose in education, because it is very tiring to come to school and then go home, and you're living a different lifestyle.

My mother's schooling, she started out in an Indian boarding school. She dropped out a few times and then had a family. Then she went to the University of Montana and dropped out again. She is just completing her degree in education, and she hopes to be a lobbyist for Indian education. My father pretty much had the same experience, boarding schools, Indian boarding schools, and then he dropped out of college also. He is no longer alive.

I plan on staying in school. It is extremely hard though. I've found, being involved with my own culture.

I don't believe dropping out of school is the best choice, because to empower the Native American youth, to preserve their own culture, it means getting over the obstacles. And every single obstacle that you overcome, the greater your empowerment is, and the more enfranchised Indian people will be.

My role models are my peers, other Native American youth who have experienced the same things that I have experienced, yet come through it and are doing a lot better. Also my family, I guess, are my role models. But to see people that have made it, that are my age and that have come from a more severe background than I have come from, those are my role models.

I'm not really sure what I plan to do. Perhaps I'm heading in the direction of education. I might want to become a lawyer for Indian education, something in that area, or maybe engineering, such as architecture.

These goals that I have for me are not for myself. I was not put on this earth for my own benefit. I was put on this earth for the benefit of the Native American people as a whole, and that will make it easier to get over all of those obstacles.

Most people that I know that are white and usually come from upper-class families, I guess, or middle-class families, they don't have that cultural value. They don't have that tie to their ancestors that we do. And after school, I come home and I'm working on ways to improve Native American life. And then on the weekends, I'll be going off to powwows. Powwows are very important to me because they are a celebration of my culture.

A lot of times, Native American people will make a living out of this, that's how they put food on the tables, winning these contests at these powwows, making this money to get through the next week and help their families out. And then when they come back from these powwows, they're going back to school. Afterwards, they have to practice their dancing. They have to make time for their religious beliefs and everything else.

There is a bleak outlook among older people. My own grandfather was turned away from school because he could not speak English, and they would not allow him in a public school. And here he became a teacher, as my mother and maybe myself.

My reservation, Rosebud Reservation, Rosebud, South Dakota, it's kind of desert-like. It's a prairie-like rolling hills. The towns are small, they're dirty, they're littered with trash. When you look down the road, you see a lot of alcoholics. You see a lot of children, very dirty, wearing hardly anything.

You see a lot of poverty, but then you also see the white houses. You can tell when a person is white, usually. This is kind of stereotyping, but it is pretty honest. It's truthful. You see the white houses, and they have the green grass, they have the nice kept yards. And you look across the street, and there's an Indian house with no windows, they are all broken out maybe, no doors, no electricity, no bathroom. On my own reservation, less than 1%

of the people who are born on that reservation leave that reservation, and I was one of the few people that did that.

When I was on my reservation, I was born into a world where there was a lot of alcoholism, where there was a lot of poverty. My own father was an alcoholic, and my doctor at the time of delivery was stoned and he was also drunk, but he was the only doctor there. And I was his first delivery that he had ever had. Seeing my neighbors, you see abuse, you see all of this, but you learn to overcome it all. And I don't live there anymore. I'm an urban Indian, people might call me now.

Good things about living on your reservation is your culture, and you have these family ties, these ancestors that have lived on the same land that you have lived for your entire life. That's a good thing. That's where your people are, that's where you can speak your own tongue and everyone understands you. Just you have everything in common. That counts.

If I had the chance to move back to my reservation, I don't think that I could. I've seen it and I've lived there, and I've seen how destructive it is on a person. I would like to help, though. Maybe go back and help, 'cause there is a great need for people who can help, and all of those problems, they make me think about what can I do. Why was I put here? What can I do to decrease this downhill acceleration?

Your reservation is your lifeline. That's where everything goes on. That's everything important. That's your culture. That's your religion and everything that brings you through all of the hardships in your life.

Right now we're in the middle of the seventh generation, that is my generation. And according to prophecy, this is the generation that is supposed to relieve the stress and stuff of the Native American people. It is really hard for people that come from a reservation. ■ **Interviewed by Kelly Hartley, 15 and Joe Huser, 15**

Chris, 17

Chris is a white male who is short and thick, like a football player, which he wanted to be. He was very articulate and mentally strong. He seemed ready to hurdle any obstacle that would confront him, either now or in the future. Even though he's been through a lot in his past, he's basically learned from that. He's not running away from the mistakes that he made. ■ Mark Jennings

Basically, I'm a pretty interesting person, fun to be around. I'm a sports fanatic.

I was a little football player. I was going to be a pro football player. That's basically all I did. I was football this, football that, you know, even though I was a little bitty thing. I was football-crazy. I played peewee football. I usually made, like, one of the No. 1 players on the team. I was there all the time. I've always been big for my size. So, you know, it was real easy to dominate over everybody. I was in gifted classes and stuff like that, but I never really worried about college. If I went to college, it was going to be for football, not my grades.

I snapped my ankle in high school football, so that put football out. So now I'm kind of trying to see what I can do with working with animals and stuff like that. I loved animals when I was little. So, if I couldn't be a pro football player, then I started saying, "Well, I'll be a veterinarian." I'm an animal freak. I had thought about that.

My mom's a real bad drug addict. Basically, she's real psychotic. My mom, you know, she was a prostitute. So she'd bring people over, and I got molested a couple of times. So I still can sit up at night and just—it would flash in my head. I try to forget it, but it's real hard. It just keeps going on. It keeps ringing in my head. It happens every day.

I was raised in foster homes. My mom pretty much had a boyfriend that beat her up real bad, and I got pretty much physical where I could take up for her, and I did take up for her. So she told me to get out. I guess she thought he was more important than me. So I ended up moving in with my girlfriend, and I went to school for a little while.

I'm a high school dropout. They had me fixed up on some kind of Social Security check that came to me, and then they got certain age limits and stuff like that. They were going to stop my check before I could graduate. So I dropped out and went to tech school. I got real good mechanic skills and everything like that. So I just figured I'd go and take diesel mechanics. I work pretty much about 12 hours a week. They pay good, and so I can at least start off a little bit better than, you know, nothing.

It's not that I didn't want to go to school. My grades were good. It was just I was behind, because, by being in a foster home and stuff, I failed a couple of grades. They would pull me out of one school and put me in another one, and another one, you know. So I had poor attendance and stuff like that, but as far as grade-wise, I'm really good.

I'm taking college courses in the college and doing real good in them. I'm not mad or upset with myself because I dropped out. I mean, I did it for a good reason.

I don't know who my dad is. I know his name. That's about all I know. Basically, what it was is they had sex, and she come up and found out she was pregnant. My mom says that he knows who I am, that he said that he knows me and that he wants to do this and do that.

So something happened, and he's not to have anything to do with me until I'm 18, and then if I want to go and see him when I turn 18, I can go, you know, see him.

See, I turn 18 the 22nd of this month. So I got a feeling I'm fixing to head to Georgia and go see if I can find him. I don't know how I'm going to react, you know. I mean, I probably want to knock him out or something. I just want to know what happened, you know.

My grandparents tell me that he's real interested in seeing me, he's tried all this time. So I really don't know who to believe. So it's going to be a lot of emotions involved when I do finally get to see him.

I'd probably forgive him. I'd really like to know who I look like, because I don't look like my mom. So it would be interesting. So, I mean, I'd probably give him another chance, you know. I gave my mom plenty of them.

I still love her, she's my mother. But, you know, if I talk to her on the phone, certain things she says brings back the past where she, you know, beat me up. You know, a lot of things happened to me, and she just sat there and let them happen and stuff. So I got a lot of resentment toward her. I don't hate her, but, you know, I wish she would at least try to apologize. I bring it up and tell her, "Well, you did this and you did that." And she goes, "Well, I don't remember doing it." That's not what I want to hear.

I've been living with my girlfriend, Heidi. We pretty much played it safe. Her parents knew we was having sex and everything, and I messed around, got stupid, and didn't use the protection.

I'm not ashamed that she's pregnant. I'm in a very good situation where things will come out pretty good, you know.

As soon as I get out of school, I'm going to be making real good money. So that's no problem. I'm working now to put money back, so when the baby's born, I've got it pretty much planned out, you know. It's no problem.

My girlfriend's got a 14-year-old sister that just had a baby of her own. The guy left her, wouldn't have nothing to do with her. He's about a month or two younger than me. He just won't have nothing to do with her or the baby, and she was really worried that I was going to do the same thing.

Her mom got kind of ticked off at me, but she knows I've stuck around. I help out. I went out and bought God knows how many baby clothes and everything, and her baby thinks I'm his daddy anyway. It pretty much looks up to me, you know, as a father figure. So she really is not really worried about it.

She gets on her kicks, "Well, if you all been behaving yourselves," or this and that, you know. Basically, she's pretty cool with it. She just wants me to take my part, and she's trying to help me out as much as possible.

Her dad, he's all right about it. He likes me a lot, and he wished we had waited, but he knows I'm in a situation where I can take care of the baby, and he kind of compares it to her sister and knows I'm going to hang around. I'm going to be there for it and everything like that. So, basically, everything is good.

My mom, she's happy. She wants to make sure I can take care of it and stuff. She's got it in her head that I'm going to let the baby stay at her house and stuff like that, you know. I just don't know. Even though she's sober now and not doing what she did, I don't know if I want to trust her judgment around my child.

Everything's pretty good, you know. I'd really like to tell my dad the situation, but I just have to see.

For prenatal care the school's got the clinic going. She's going there. I sit out in the waiting room. Basically, what they're doing now is just they're checking her blood, making sure everything's all right for her.

I tried to get her on my insurance. Where I work at, I've got Blue Cross, and basically the way they see it, they keep the baby on it because it's mine, but they can't get my girlfriend on it until we get married. So, basically, what we're going to do is get her on Medicaid to help her out, even though I am bringing up enough money to buy stuff. WIC and everything will help her out and give her all the stuff she needs right now while she's pregnant. And then, when the baby's born, they kind of just jump off of her and give the baby all its foods and cereals, and if she's not breast feeding it, give it all its formula and stuff like that.

The clinic pretty much will do everything she needs for right now, and when Medicaid gets in, I'm going to get her in, like, this local hospital. It's not but a couple blocks away from us. That way, if I'm not here, then she can get there before I get there. Basically, I've got it straightened out.

If I'm not mistaken, I get to find out if I got one heartbeat or two heartbeats down there. Twins run in my family, so I'm real anxious to find out today whether I got two. Then, again, maybe it's back in the back, so they can't hear. So I have to find out when they do the sonar.

I've got nine sets of twins plus two sets of triplets on my side of the family, and my girlfriend's family has got twins. I wish they would come after I've had some kind of practice, but I can't take it back. I have to take whatever comes, you know. I'm pretty good at adjusting, so I guess that will be what I'll have to do.

I want a little girl. I know I have to worry about her a little bit more the way things are down here, you know. My feeling, girls get picked up a lot faster than little boys, and it's going to be blonde-haired, blue eyes, most definitely. So it's going to make it even more.

So, yeah, I want a little girl, you know, but then again I'm going to have to worry about her more and stuff like that. So it kind of makes you wonder, but I'll take whatever comes. As long as it's healthy.

I would try to tell her, you know, exactly the meaning of sex and everything and what kind of trouble it can get her into, and then I would try to, more than likely, tell her she better not do it, you know.

You're not going to stop them from having sex. If she feels like she's going to have sex, then she's going to do it. But I still think there's going to be a guy out there, because, I'm sorry, I've never seen no virgin girl just go and, you know, jump on no guy. It takes two.

So I just have to watch her and be open-minded that way. If she had any questions or anything, you know, to talk to me. I'd probably be real aggressive with her and tell her, "Don't, not unless you know this is the person you're going to be with forever." I'd just tell her, "I know I'm a guy, and I've seen a lot of guys tell a girl anything they want to hear, just to do it." So I'd tell her just to use her best judgment. If she don't feel right asking me, she can ask her mother.

I'm happy with who I'm with and, I guess, basically, that it all happened for a reason, you know. So, if I was to try to change anything, if I wasn't worried about it affecting my future, it would be some of the things my mom did to me. If I had anybody to blame for the way my life turned out, it would be my mom. But, you know, the man upstairs did it for some reason. I'm still wanting to know why, but I don't think I'd change anything.

After I didn't know my father and I had all these problems with my mom, before I had started dating my girlfriend, I really would never give a girl a chance. Something about Heidi—I don't know—I guess I can honestly say I fell in love with her. So I started trusting her. Then I found out she had some of the situations that I had. I can't say hers are worse than mine or mine are worse than hers. So I can really talk to her and I'd do anything for her.

We knew what we was getting into. We knew there was a chance of her getting pregnant. She wasn't worried about it. She knew she would love the baby and be happy with it, and I knew that I would love the baby and I'd be happy with it. So, even though things would get hard, you know, we was going to stick together, no matter what. I mean, we have our fights big time now, but it always ends up kisses and hugs, and we forget about it.

I don't think the baby's got anything to do with my dad or anything like that. I know I'm going to be there. It makes me even more determined to stay around, you know. Even though my momma did what I said, I was a little mamma's boy, and I know how important it is to have a father now. I hate going to restaurants and seeing family dinners with the mother, the father and a

little kid, you know. It just makes me so sick, you know. It made me more determined to make it work, you know.

I really don't want my child to grow up the way I did.

More than likely, I see myself ten years from now as a mechanic, probably got two or three more kids, still happily married. Soon as she gets old enough, we're getting married. I see myself as a normal person, you know, making it. I won't be, like, rich-rich, but I can afford to take a couple of days off and relax without having to worry about money.

If someone gave me a million dollars, I would probably buy a house, not some big, humongous house—maybe a five-bedroom house, a couple acres of land. Put a little bit of money back, I guess, for the kids. I'm a charity giver anyway. I'd try to give money to all kind of causes even though they could be frauds or whatever. I'd probably give a little bit of it to either help churches or help the homeless or something.

Now, I'd probably get crazy on a car or something like that, just to have something with a little bit of luxury to it, but just basically a house, land, and I'd put up a little bit of it for charities and stuff like that.

I wish things were different in our country and we didn't have to worry about everything, you know. You got to worry about our children now and everything in the future. So I'd wish a lot of the problems in the future that we're having with the ozone and nuclear and stuff like that would disappear. I wish I wouldn't have any more bad events in my life, and I believe I've had enough.

And basically—let's wish something for myself here—I wish no matter what, if something was to happen, I'd always have somebody there to help me out.

I know how a lot of these guys feel when it comes to getting their girl pregnant and everything. It's not as hard as everybody thinks it is. It's real easy to get a job. I don't care how difficult it is.

I got a job real quick. I had no experience when I did it. I just explained to them, "Hey, I need a job," you know, "I've got a baby on the way," and a lot of people understand.

You save a lot of time by not running, because the way it is now, if you run, you're going to get tracked down with child support charges anyway, you know.

So basically, I tell them not to give up. Stick with her, you know. She needs help, too, you know. It takes two to tango. If you got a kid, it's not that baby's fault that they didn't know how to use protection. So I don't think that baby should suffer from the parents' fault. Stick in there. That's what I'm going to do.

I dream a lot about my past, and there's always this A-B-C choice of ways I could have changed it, and it's like every time I dream, I always pick the same one I did. So that is not good.

I dream of the future. Like, when I found out Heidi was pregnant, I dream about what the baby's going to look like, am I going to be a good father. And sometimes I down myself, you know. I'm worried that what my mom did to me, that I'm going to do it—I worry about that. I dream about that all the time.

■ Interviewed by Kristen Crockett, 16 and Mark Jennings, 16

Appendices

Although [illegible] of the stories seem hopeless, I think there is an answer to the problems young people are facing. There are programs in this country that are working, but they are isolated. If we could take the programs that are making a difference and introduce them into every community, then I think we would see a change. It would take a great deal of money and many volunteers, but it would make an impact.

The situations are not hopeless. Kids need programs and role models to pull them through seemingly hopeless times.

Amy Weisenbach, 17
Children's Express, Indianapolis

Problems are not just restricted to lower class, poor, black, ghetto kids. When we were in Las Vegas, we saw a lot of white kids from middle-class families with good jobs and good homes who were in trouble because there was nothing there for kids to do. And they go out and they start getting into drugs or whatever.

Suki Cheong, 16 *Children's Express, New York*

Alabama

Ensley High School, Birmingham
Mrs. Bunk McCain, Birmingham
Mt. Meigs Detention Center, Mt. Meigs
STEPS (Strategies to Elevate People), Montgomery
West Alabama Health Services, Eutaw
Wilcox County Courthouse Annex, Camden

California

Challengers Boys and Girls Club, Los Angeles
Contra Costa County Violence Prevention Project, Richmond
Familias Unidas, Richmond
Highland Hospital, Oakland
Lao Family Community Development Organization, Richmond
Larkin St. Youth Center, San Francisco
Loved Ones of Homicide Victims, Los Angeles
McClymonds High School-Age Mothers Program, Oakland
Positive Alternatives, Inglewood and Lawndale

Connecticut

Pat Boozer, New Haven
Boys and Girls Club, Bridgeport
Longlane School for Delinquents, Middletown
Regional Youth and Adult Substance Abuse Project, Bridgeport
Youth Shelter Inc., Greenwich
YWCA of New Haven, New Haven

Florida

Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Tampa
Children's Board of Hillsboro County, Tampa
Project THRIVE, Child Abuse Council, Tampa
Tampa Community Center, Tampa

Illinois

Aunt Martha's Youth Service Center, Inc., Employment and Family Service Unit, Park Forest
Coalition for the Homeless, Chicago
CYCLE (Community Youth Creative Learning Experiences), Chicago
Chicago Area Project, Chicago
HARPO Productions, Chicago
Harris Center YWCA, Young Parents' Program, Chicago
Homer Park Fieldhouse, Teacher's Academy of Math and Science, Chicago
Illinois Caucus of Teen Pregnancy, Chicago
Roosevelt High School, Youth Guidance, Chicago

Indiana

Deborah Derby, Anderson
Indiana Youth Institute, Youth Advisory Council, Indianapolis
Logansport High School, Logansport
Tipton County School-Migrant Summer School, Tipton

Kansas

Boys and Girls Club, Wichita
First Step, Wichita
Social and Rehabilitation Services, Topeka
Wichita Children's Home, Wichita

Kentucky

Cardinal Treatment Center, Louisville
Douglass Center, Louisville
Home of the Innocent, Louisville
Jefferson County Schools, Louisville
Tingley House, Volunteers of America, Louisville
YMCA Shelter, Youth Alternatives, Louisville
Youth Explorer Program, Department of Parks and Recreation, Louisville

Maine

Community Employment Project, Portland
Peer Leaders of Portland, Portland
Youth Alternatives, Portland
YWCA Fairharbor Shelter, Portland

Maryland

Crossroads, Baltimore
St. Anne's Infant and Maternity Home, Hyattsville

Massachusetts

Boys and Girls Club, Charlestown and Salem
Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Boston
Children's Legal Caucus, Boston
City Year, Youth Services Corps, Boston
Melissa Doran and Shauna Wilson, Danvers
Dorchester House, Dorchester
Kid Company, Boston
Massachusetts Advocacy Center, Boston
Stephen and Christopher Messinger, Danvers
Phoenix Enrichment Center, Salem
Hector Rosa, Jamaica Plain
Stepping Stones, Boston
Student Advisory Council, Massachusetts Department of Education, Malden
Teens as Community Resources, Boston
Youth Advisory Council, Dedham

Missouri

Ad Hoc Group Against Crime, Kansas City
Children's Mercy Hospital, Kansas City
De La Salle Alternative High School, Kansas City
Don Bosco Community Center, Garfield
Genesis School, Kansas City
YWCA of Kansas City

Montana

Child and Family Resource Council, Missoula
City-County Health Department, Missoula
Flathead Reservation, Missoula
Missoula Children's Theatre, Missoula
Missoula Youth Homes, Missoula
Native American Services Association, Missoula
Planned Parenthood, Missoula
Save Our Kids, Missoula
YMCA, Missoula

Nevada

Moapa Indian Reservation, Moapa
Nevada Homes for Youth, Las Vegas
Probation Services Detention Center, Las Vegas
Regina Hall, Henderson
Spring Mountain Youth Camp, Spring Mountain
Tough Love, Las Vegas

New Jersey

Academic Achievers, Newark
Boys and Girls Club, Newark
Camden Community Youth Center, Blackwood
Family Counseling Service, Camden
James Street Neighborhood Center, Newark
La Casa de Don Pedro, Newark
Lifeties, Trenton
New Jersey Training School for Boys, Jamesburg
United Hospital for Family Life, Newark
United Valsburg Youth Development, Newark
Volunteers of America, Camden

New Mexico

Coalition for Children, Albuquerque
Hogares, Inc., Albuquerque
Futures for Children, Albuquerque
Pathways/YDI, Albuquerque
The Shelter, New Day, Inc., Albuquerque
Youth Development, Albuquerque

New York

Builders for Family & Youth, Brooklyn
Cage Teen Center, New York
CAMBA Choices for Youth, Brooklyn
Changing Scenes/Theatre for the Forgotten, New York
Children's Aid Society, New York
Citizens Advice Bureau, New York
ENTER Runaway Shelter, New York
Freeport Youth Outreach, Freeport
Humboldt Street YMCA, Brooklyn
Lambert's Young Parents Program, New York
Lifeline Summer Program, South Ozone Park Community Center, Brooklyn
New Directions, Bronx
New York City Department of Health, New York
POWER, Goldwater Hospital, Roosevelt Island
Ronald McDonald House, New York
Safe Space Drop-in Center, New York
SCAN-NY (Supportive Children Advocacy Network), New York
Spofford, Dept. of Juvenile Justice, Hunts Point
Stanley M. Isaac Community Center, New York
Teen RAPP-Pride Site, New York
Volunteers of America Runaway Shelter, New York
Washington Houses Community Program, New York
Youth Force, New York
Youth Mediation Corps, New York
Teen Opportunity Program, New York
Variety Boys and Girls Club, Long Island City

Texas

Lemon Avenue Bridge, Dallas
Lena Pope Home, Inc., Ft. Worth
Mesquite Boys and Girls Club, Mesquite
Rainbow Days, Dallas
Van Zandt Elementary School, Ft. Worth
YMCA/CASA Shelter, Dallas

Virginia

Fairfax County YMCA, Project Life/Resource Mothers, Fairfax

Washington, DC

Barney House
CADA (Corporation Against Drug Abuse)
Children's Hospital
City Lights School
Coalition for the Homeless, Spring Road Family Shelter
House of Ruth
Kidspace
Martha's Table
Sasha Bruce Youthworks
Very Special Arts

Washington

Friends of Youth, Seattle
Garfield Community Center, Seattle
Lambert House, Seattle
Seattle Youth Involvement, Seattle
Youth Care/Straley House, Seattle

West Virginia

Department of Health and Human Resources, Martinsburg
Martinsburg Shelter, Martinsburg
Youth Detention Center, Martinsburg

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- Created in 1975, Children's Express (CE) is a national non-profit youth development and leadership organization which uses oral journalism to give children a significant voice in the world.

- CE's weekly national column is researched, reported, and edited by reporters (8-13) and teen editors (14-18) for audiences of all ages, and is syndicated to newspapers around the country, including Knight-Ridder newspapers (28), Newhouse newspapers (24), The Indianapolis Star, the New York Amsterdam News, the Montgomery (AL) Advertiser, the Chatham (NY) Courier, the Greenville (SC) News, the Waco (TX) Tribune Herald and The Sentinel (Prince George's and Montgomery County (MD) newspapers.

- CE has published three books of children's voices, including the recently released *Voices From the Future: Our Children Tell Us About Violence in America* (Crown/Random House). In 1993, CE convened three days of national public hearings in Washington, DC, on "Violence in the Child's Life: At Home, At School, and On the Streets." CE news teams have covered the past five Presidential conventions and elections, and since 1987 have held a bi-annual symposium on "The Media and Children's Issues," involving journalists, experts and reporters from various CE news bureaus.

- CE received George Foster Peabody and Emmy Awards for "Campaign '88," broadcast on PBS as part of its 13-segment show, "CE News magazine."

- CE reporters and editors have appeared on "Today," "Good Morning America," "60 Minutes," "20/20," "Sonya Live" (CNN), ABC, CBS and NBC evening news, MacNeil Lehrer and countless local television programs. CE has been heard and covered on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," "Morning Edition" and "Talk of the Nation," "The Diane Rehm Show," Voice of America broadcasts, and numerous other radio shows.

- Headquartered in Washington, DC, CE operates bureaus in New York, Washington, Indianapolis, Oakland and Marquette (MI).

Voices from the Future: Our Children Tell Us About Violence in America (Crown Random House 1994)

Children's Express turns its journalistic skills to the story of violence and American children. CE went out into the streets and into the shelters and schools to solicit one-on-one interviews with the young people who are the victims of—and sometimes the agents of—violence. Filled with emotion, introspection and humor, *Voices* testifies with immediacy and power to the ways in which children internalize, reenact and survive the violence in our world.*

Violence in the Child's Life: at Home, at School and on the Streets

Proceedings from three days of public hearings convened by CE in October, 1993. The testimony of children and adults is riveting. Also features community programs that are working to counter the effects of violence. ($5.00/copy)

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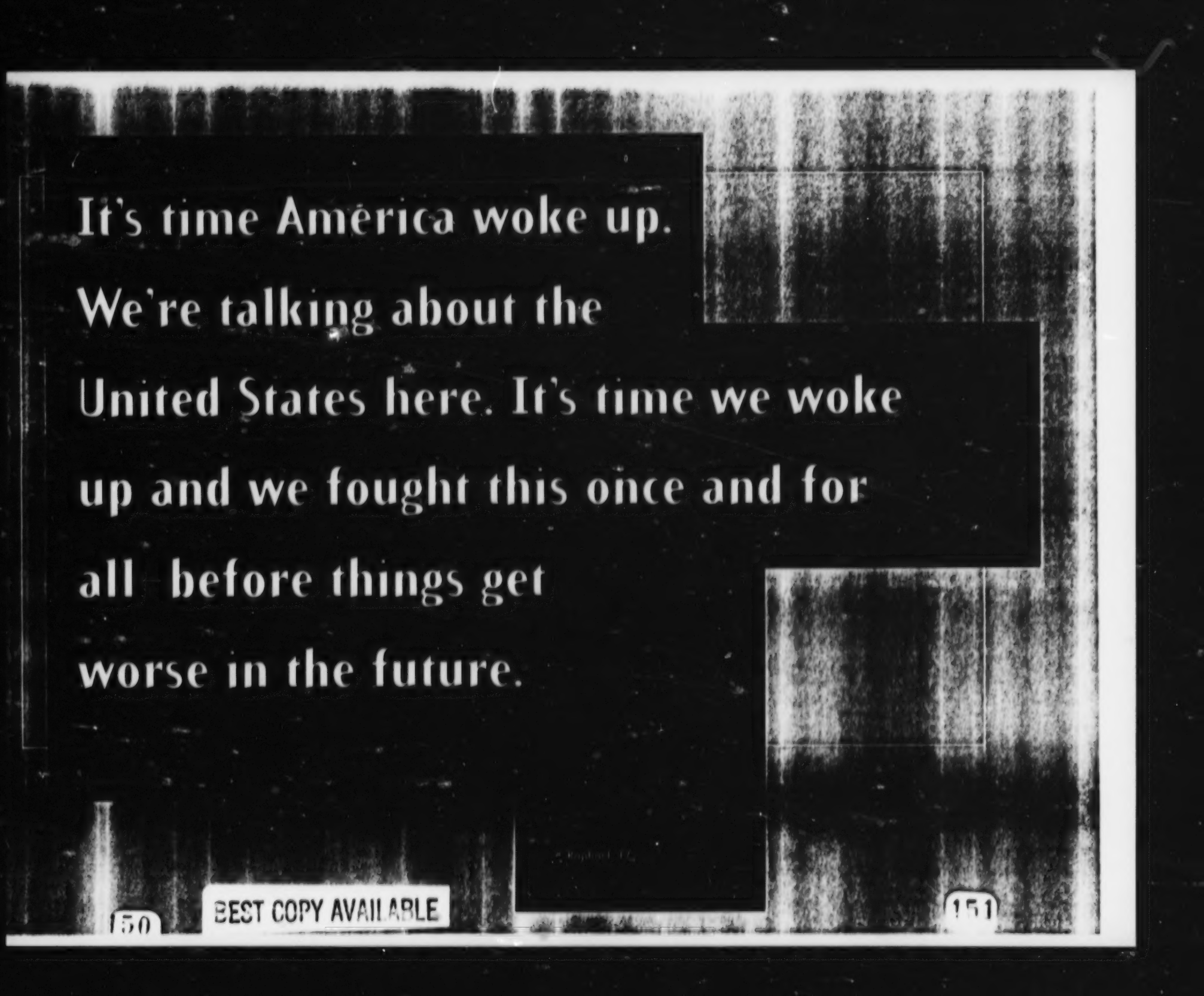
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up and we fought this once and for
all before things get
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